

UAMS News Bureau

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UAMS Invests Sheldon Riklon, M.D., in Kohler Professorship

LITTLE ROCK — Sheldon Riklon, M.D., one of only two Marshallese physicians in the world who has completed medical school and residency training from U.S.-accredited programs, has been invested as the inaugural holder of the Peter O. Kohler, M.D., Endowed Distinguished Professorship in Health Disparities.

The Sept. 15 investiture ceremony was held in front of friends, colleagues and family at the Botanical Garden of the Ozarks in Springdale.

The distinguished professorship was established by and named for Peter Kohler, M.D., vice chancellor of the northwest Arkansas campus and president emeritus of Oregon Health and Science University, where he served as president for more than 18 years. Kohler, a distinguished professor in the Department of Internal Medicine, will retire as vice chancellor at the end of the year but will continue to conduct clinical research in the Center for Pacific Islander Health.

“Pete’s dedication to the mission of UAMS is evident in his many years of service at both the Little Rock and Fayetteville campuses and his focus on improving access to health care in underserved areas,” said Chancellor Dan Rahn, M.D. “It is only fitting that his generous gift would establish a distinguished professorship to continue that legacy of care and research in northwest Arkansas.”

The Peter O. Kohler, M.D., Endowed Distinguished Professorship in Health Disparities will allow the holder to focus on research and clinical treatment of medical conditions experienced by the northwest Arkansas population, with an initial emphasis on such conditions experienced by Marshallese and Pacific Islanders in the area, as well as the Hispanic population.

“Dr. Kohler’s legacy in Marshallese and Pacific Islander health extends well beyond the walls of the northwest campus; it is because of him we have been able to address the

significant disparities in our own backyard,” said Pearl McElfish, Ph.D., associate vice chancellor of the Northwest Regional Campus, director of the Office of Community Health and Research and co-director of the Center for Pacific Islander Health.

An endowed distinguished professorship requires a minimum of \$500,000 in donations. Those funds are invested, and the interest is used to support the honored faculty member’s educational, scientific and clinical pursuits.

Kohler said he established the endowed distinguished professorship to “heighten our success in recruiting to UAMS’ Northwest Regional Campus a fully integrated physician — researcher, teacher, mentor, and someone with a personal stake in helping the Marshallese and Hispanic communities gain better health.” He added, “I am so pleased that Sheldon Riklon is the inaugural holder. I consider the recruitment of Dr. Riklon to be one of the great accomplishments of the center and campus.”

Riklon, an associate professor in the College of Medicine’s Department of Family and Preventive Medicine, joined UAMS in August, coming from the John A. Burns School of Medicine at the University of Hawaii at Mānoa, where he was an assistant professor and the family medicine clerkship director in the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health.

He was educated in Hawaii, receiving his bachelor’s degree in biology from the University of Hawaii at Hilo and his medical degree from the John A. Burns School of Medicine.

The decision to leave warm, sunny Hawaii for Arkansas’ much colder winters wasn’t an easy one for him and his wife, Lynda, Riklon said, noting that he had spent more than 20 years in the state. But in the end, he wanted to be a part of UAMS’ efforts to improve the health of the Marshallese community.

“I wanted to come to northwest Arkansas to work with UAMS’ northwest campus and the Community Clinic, so I can do what I went to medical school for all those years — serve the Marshallese people as a physician,” he said. “I’ve come to learn that I can do even more for the Marshallese people by being more than a clinician. I need to be an academician, a researcher, a teacher, a mentor, an advisor, a recruiter, a consultant and an Ozark islander.”

In less than two months, Riklon has already helped a number of patients at UAMS’ three clinics in the region and the Community Clinic in Springdale, Kohler said.

“Dr. Riklon said he wanted to help his people, and he could best do it from here,” said Kohler. “His work will have a lasting effect, not only here, but also in the islands and worldwide.”

Riklon was presented the professorship medallion by Rahn and College of Medicine Dean Pope L. Moseley, M.D. Also speaking during the ceremony were Provost and Chief Academic Officer Stephanie Gardner, Pharm.D., Ed.D., and Nia Aitaoto, Ph.D., M.P.H., co-director of the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences’ Center for Pacific Islander Health.

“It is truly an honor to work with Dr. Kohler and to be the inaugural recipient of the professorship that bears his name,” said Riklon. “I will do my best to live up to the name and the intentions of this endowed professorship.”

UAMS is the state’s only comprehensive academic health center, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; a hospital; a northwest Arkansas regional campus; a statewide network of regional centers; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, the Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, the Myeloma Institute, the Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, the Psychiatric Research Institute, the Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging and the Translational Research Institute. It is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. UAMS has 3,021 students, 789 medical residents and five dental residents. It is the state’s largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including about 1,000 physicians and other professionals who provide care to patients at UAMS, Arkansas Children’s Hospital, the VA Medical Center and UAMS regional centers throughout the state. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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