

FOREWORD

RESEARCH FROM THE ELEVENTH RCMI INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON HEALTH DISPARITIES

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This special issue of *Ethnicity and Disease* highlights selected papers presented at the Eleventh RCMI International Symposium on Health Disparities held in Honolulu, Hawaii, USA, from December 1–4, 2008. The symposium was hosted by the University of Hawaii at Manoa and officially supported by the Research Centers in Minority Institutions (RCMI) Program, Division of Research Infrastructure (DRI), National Center for Research Resources (NCRR), National Institutes of Health (NIH), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). In maintaining the strong tradition initiated with the first RCMI International Symposium in 1988, the 2008 program provided a forum for the exchange of ideas and new scientific knowledge on current issues in health and disease, and allowed RCMI investigators and international scientists to strengthen their communication and co-operation in this important field of public health and medicine. The symposium also had a special appeal to investigators dedicated to translational research. This rapidly expanding field offers practical and cost-effective approaches to improving public health through translation of new scientific knowledge and discoveries from basic sciences to patient care and community health. The symposium offered unparalleled opportunities for networking and exchange of ideas, leading to inter-institutional scientific collaboration, resource sharing and specialized training.

The overall theme of the 2008 symposium, Research Outcomes Accelerating Discoveries for Medical Applications & Practice (ROADMAP), was meant to embrace the tenets of the NIH Roadmap. As such, the Eleventh RCMI International Symposium on Health Disparities showcased the basic science and clinical and translational research excellence at the 18

RCMI grantee institutions, embedded in eight schools of medicine, two colleges of pharmacy, seven graduate programs, and one school of veterinary medicine, located in Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, Tennessee, Texas, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. Activities within these programs encourage creative strategies aimed at reducing and eliminating ethnic and racial disparities in health through basic, clinical and translational science, while also fostering the development of sustainable and culturally appropriate prevention and/or intervention programs through community engagement and empowerment.

The overarching goal of the Eleventh RCMI International Symposium on Health Disparities was to enhance research skills and facilitate collaborations and partnerships among RCMI institutions through a series of scientific presentations and interactive training workshops. The symposium featured keynote lectures by individuals who have made seminal contributions to improving healthcare access and to empowering vulnerable populations and marginalized communities. Keynote speakers featured seasoned scientists and experts who have been recognized by the MacArthur Foundation or recipients of other national distinctions, including NIH Innovator and Pioneer awardees. Scientific sessions consisted of plenary lectures and platform and poster presentations on the environmental, cultural, socioeconomic, biobehavioral and genetic bases of health disparities in cancer, cardiovascular disease, HIV/AIDS, diabetes and metabolic syndromes, and neurological disorders. Workshops were offered on grantsmanship, mentoring, career development, community-based par-

ticipatory research, small business grant program opportunities, and telehealth.

The symposium attracted more than 500 participants and more than 300 scientific presentations across the medical, biomedical and public health disciplines. The full-length manuscripts presented in this issue were peer-reviewed and selected for publication by experts in their respective health-related fields.

We would like to acknowledge this supplement's authors for their involvement and cooperation, and for their contributions to advancing medical and biomedical science and to improving public health and the quality of life. We would also like to thank all of our peer reviewers, who took time from their busy schedules to carefully and critically review each of the manuscripts.

Finally, we wish to extend our special thanks to Dr. Barbara Alving, director of the NCRR, and Dr. Sidney A. McNairy, Jr., director of DRI and NCRR associate director, for their visionary leadership and outstanding contributions to the RCMI Program, as well as the entire DRI staff for their tireless efforts in support of the RCMI grantee institutions. On behalf of the entire organizing committee, special thanks are also extended to all our colleagues and staff who worked diligently to ensure the success of the symposium.

About the Research Centers in Minority Institutions

Administered by the Division of Research Infrastructure of the National Center for Research Resources (NCRR), the Research Centers in Minority Institutions (RCMI) Program is a congressionally mandated program, initiated by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in 1985. The authorizing legislation

for the program highlighted the findings of the annual report from the Department of Health and Human Services Secretary's Task Force on the health status of the American people, and noted major health disparities between minority and majority Americans. The legislation also acknowledged the important role that minority educational institutions have traditionally played in training professionals who provide health care to the minority community. Implicit in the legislative language is the major role that minority institutions must play in order for the NIH to address the health needs of the entire US citizenry. Through the enhancement of the research capacity of RCMI-eligible institutions for the conduct of state-of-the-art biomedical and/or behavioral research, this mandate can be achieved.

The mission of the RCMI Program is to expand the national capability for research in the health sciences by assisting, through grant support, predominantly minority institutions, that offer doctorates in the health professions and/or health-related sciences, to strengthen their research environments. The primary goal of the RCMI Program is to enable these institutions to become more competitive in obtaining support for the conduct of biomedical and/or behavioral research relevant to the mission of the US Public Health Service. This goal was expanded to include the development of research infrastructure to support clinical research through the establishment of the RCMI Clinical Research Infrastructure Initiative (RCRII) in 1995 and the Centers of Clinical Research Excellence (CCRE) in 1999. Moreover, in order to support the translation of basic research into innovative medical applications and widespread clinical practice, Comprehensive Centers on Health Disparities (CCHD) were established in 2003.