

UAMS News Bureau

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UAMS Elevates Kohler Endowed Professorship to Endowed Chair

LITTLE ROCK – The Peter O. Kohler, M.D., Endowed Distinguished Professorship in Health Disparities has been elevated to the endowed chair level at the Northwest Regional Campus of the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS).

A distinguished professorship is established with gifts of \$500,000 to support the educational, research and clinical activities of the chair holder. An endowed chair is established with gifts of \$1 million. The additional funds, which came from endowment investments, a donation from the Faculty Group Practice matching fund and a second donation by Dr. Kohler, will allow the chair holder, Sheldon Riklon, M.D., to focus even greater efforts on research and clinical treatment of health disparities among the Marshallese and Pacific Islander population in northwest Arkansas.

An endowed chair is among the highest academic honors a university can bestow on a faculty member. Those named to a chair are among the most highly regarded scientists, physicians and professors in their fields.

Riklon is one of only two Marshallese physicians in the world who has completed medical school and residency training from U.S.-accredited programs. Northwest Arkansas is home to the largest population of Marshallese people in the continental United States, which was a strong motivation for Riklon to relocate to the area.

Riklon was the inaugural holder of the professorship after it was established in 2016 by a gift from Dr. Kohler, former vice chancellor for the UAMS Northwest Regional Campus. Since his retirement, Kohler, a distinguished professor in the College of Medicine Department of Internal Medicine, has continued to conduct clinical research in the Center for Pacific Islander Health in Fayetteville.

“Pete’s generous original endowment gift personified his dedication to improving access to health care for underserved populations,” said UAMS Chancellor Cam Patterson, M.D. “And we are extremely pleased that the endowment has grown to this level, which will allow an even broader scope of health care and research in Arkansas.”

In American higher education, endowed faculty professorships and chairs have become the gold standard for recruiting and retaining faculty. At the time of the original

endowment gift, Kohler said he wanted to establish it 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 consider the recruitment of Dr. Riklon to be one of the great accomplishments of the center and campus.”

Riklon joined UAMS in 2016 as an associate professor in the College of Medicine’s Department of Family and Preventive Medicine, 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.

“I was, and still am, deeply honored to be selected as the inaugural recipient of the distinguished professorship,” Riklon said. “The elevation of this position to endowed chair will allow us to further advance our efforts to address health disparities in the northwest Arkansas region. I came here so I could serve the Marshallese people as a physician. This endowment has allowed me to do so much more than just be a clinician.”

“Dr. Riklon is a world-class scholar and clinician whose work will have a lasting effect around the world,” said Pearl McElfish, Ph.D., vice chancellor for the Northwest Regional Campus, director of the Office of Community Health and Research and co-director of the Center for Pacific Islander Health. “While northwest Arkansas continues to enjoy economic growth and counts itself a statewide leader in health outcomes, there are communities that are left out of that prosperity and excluded from equitable health care. We are committed to research and programs that will lead to transformation and reduction of those health inequalities and costs.”

UAMS is the state’s only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; hospital; northwest Arkansas regional campus; statewide network of regional centers; and six institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging and Translational Research Institute. It is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. UAMS has 2,727 students, 822 medical residents and five dental residents. It is the state’s largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses throughout the state, Arkansas Children’s Hospital, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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