



Affiliate Spotlights

Hawaii Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics High Fat Meets High Success at Shriners Hospitals for Children – Honolulu



The following summary written by HAND member Erin R. Van Genderen showcases success of a physician-dietitian team in Honolulu.

A physician-dietitian team at Shriners Hospital for Children in Honolulu has achieved startling results for children with severe neurological disorders through a medical approach increasingly supported by new research – the ketogenic diet.

Ryan Lee, MD, Director of the Neurodevelopmental Clinic, and Miki Wong, MACO, RD, YFT, Clinical Dietitian, began working with the ketogenic diet in 2013 at The Honolulu Shriners Hospital Neurodevelopmental Clinic, where families using the high-fat, moderate-protein, low-carbohydrate approach to manage their children's seizures inspired the clinicians to include such therapy in their practice.

Thanks to a grant from the Hawaii Medical Service Association Foundation, Lee and Wong were able to hire The Charlie Foundation, an organization devoted to ketogenic therapy education, for training, and in 2014 set up a pediatric ketogenic clinic to serve patients with epilepsy. The results have been remarkable: children with intractable epilepsy have experienced a sharp drop in seizure frequency, and some are now entirely seizure-free. Some patients were even able to come off medications altogether.

Encouraged by these success stories, Lee and Wong launched a clinical trial to study the relationship between the ketogenic diet and epilepsy in early 2015. Later that year, they initiated another clinical trial, this time to investigate the possible application of the ketogenic diet in cases of autism.

The results have been encouraging for patients and their families, even though the transition from the standard American diet to the ketogenic protocol can involve a steep learning curve.

“We’ve had a lot of positive response from the epilepsy study, with children not having seizures anymore,” Wong said. “We’ve also had great feedback from families in the autism study, whose children are more responsive, more socially interactive, who are taking care of themselves, and even some children who have spoken their first words or shown affection

for the first time. These are life-transforming changes for some families, and these changes did not happen through medicines or even other behavioral therapies. We believe that food can have a remarkable impact on the child's metabolism and brain behavior.”

Lee and Wong have an abundance of stories to tell about the success of the ketogenic diet protocol.

“Beyond these incredible stories, ketogenic therapy has excited us because it is novel,” Lee said. “This isn't your mainstream thing that people have been teaching for decades now. It's coming at healthcare and nutrition from a different approach than what our society is used to, and I think it energizes us that we're providing something that is innovative.”

The current innovation at Shriners Hospital for Children – Honolulu continues to provide inspiration for how the ketogenic diet might be useful. Lee and Wong hope to apply the ketogenic diet to ADHD, diabetes, and Alzheimer's disease in future studies. There's even talk of setting up a joint clinical trial with partners in China and Taiwan to study the effects of the ketogenic diet on children in an orphanage in Tianjin, China.

But beyond these plans, the greater hope is that continued application of the ketogenic diet will not only improve patients' health, but will change their mindsets, too.

“In the long-term future we hope to get the word out that food is medicine,” Lee said. “We hope to allow for the broader understanding of the effects of food on our bodies and as a form of healing for life.”

Lee and Wong have three posters and one presentation to explain what's happening at the Neurodevelopmental Clinic at Shriners Hospitals for Children – Honolulu. They presented at the Global Symposium for the Ketogenic Diet in Banff, Alberta, Canada in 2016, and will present at the Hawaii Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Spring Conference in Honolulu in May 2017. For more information and learn more about their work, contact [Miki Wong MACO, RD, YFT](#).