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On the Scene with Alan Wu

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Alan Wu was 9 and spoke no English when his family came to Hawaii from Taiwan. He became fluent, however, graduated from Pearl City High School and continued his education at the University of Hawaii. Several years later Wu had only enough money for his first year in medical school; a military medical scholarship enabled him to complete his studies. In 2010 he was deployed to Afghanistan, where he served a year as a medical officer at a forward operations base and earned the Bronze Star.

In November, Wu, 42, and a colleague, Dr. Tony "Dr. T" Trpkovski, opened Doctors of Waikiki, an urgent care facility in the Sheraton Princess Kaiulani Hotel, where they also provide routine medical services. The facility is open from 8 am. to midnight daily, and one or both of the doctors is there for the entire 16-hour workday (visit doctorsofwaikiki.com).

Two doctors sharing a 112-hour workweek sounds like a tremendous undertaking. Why are you doing it?

We have a vision about opening up more access to health care for people and reducing the burden on the very limited ER resources in Honolulu. We're offering access to the majority of the public — we take most medical insurance, including Medicare — so that we can help reduce that burden. When you're in Waikiki there's really not much choice for you, and most people in Hawaii work two jobs. When do they have time to go to a doctor's office working 9-to-5? Never! That's why we extended our hours to midnight.

Why urgent care?

Because I can help people immediately. People have different purposes in life. Helping people feel better is my purpose. If I can do that in some way, shape or form I feel great.

What is your most vivid memory of Afghanistan?

In that one year I probably saw about 7,000 patients. To me that was probably the most rewarding point of my life as a physician. One of the things I did I'm proudest of was helping the military develop a concussion protocol. I was out in the middle of the desert without much support and I couldn't send every soldier back (for treatment) so we developed a protocol and it's still used today.

What was the most memorable casualty you were able to save?

We had a soldier who was young, who had no risk factors, who developed a stroke. We didn't have any of the advanced imaging (equipment) so we had to go back to (basic) clinical physical examination to diagnose a stroke. I intervened early, we put him on the right medication to stabilize him to be transported from the war zone, and he recovered.

A Chinese doctor shocked the world recently when he announced that he had helped create genetically edited human babies as a step toward conferring genetic resistance to HIV. In general terms what are your thoughts on gene editing?

It is a very complex question, but for me, my wife was born with mature onset diabetes (which is genetic). If it can help people like my wife, I'm all for it (being used) to take away these genetic diseases. I'm not talking about cloning a baby, I'm talking about genetic diseases that right now we have no cure for.

What are some easy things people can do to be healthier?

One: Drink water. Two: Get some exercise. If you can get 20 to 30 minutes of physical activity a day — riding a bike or walking — that decreases your risk of heart disease. That's cumulative time, it doesn't have to be all at once.