

Kapuaola Gellert

Doctoral student
Epidemiology



Kapuaola Gellert (left) with mentor
Dr. Anna Maria Siega-Riz

“I realized I could help Hawaiians the most if I left Moloka`i to pursue my doctorate in epidemiology at UNC. —Kapuaola Gellert”

“My Aunty Dot died of lung cancer soon after I entered college,” Kapuaola Gellert recalls. “She never smoked. Her death made me wonder whether Hawaiians have a higher incidence of cancer compared to other ethnic groups.”

The loss of her aunt was the beginning of Gellert’s interest in epidemiology, leading her to complete a Master of Public Health degree. After graduation, she worked with the Native Hawaiian Health Care system, Na Pu`uwai, serving the islands of Moloka`i and Lana`i. “During the three years I lived on Moloka`i,” she says, “I developed a healthy lifestyle program, which included visits by doctors and dietitians from Oahu to evaluate the medical conditions of the program’s participants. The results showed statistically significant improvements in the participants’ blood pressure, cholesterol and weight. I realized I could help Hawaiians the most if I left Moloka`i to pursue my doctorate in epidemiology at UNC.”

On Moloka`i, Gellert met Ron Aubert, PhD, alumnus of UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health’s epidemiology doctoral program, who was working as a consultant on the island. Aubert became Gellert’s

mentor and introduced her to UNC, and subsequently, to Anna Maria Siega-Riz, PhD, professor of epidemiology and nutrition and associate dean for academic affairs at the School. “Dr. Siega-Riz has advised me while I collaborate with colleagues on Moloka`i to develop research plans focused on the Hawaiian community,” Gellert says.



Gellert helped shoppers make
healthful choices in Moloka`i.