

Harvard's health school gets record \$350M gift (Update)

September 8 2014, by Bob Salsberg

Harvard University announced Monday that its school of public health has received a record \$350 million donation to support students and bolster research into major global health threats.

The gift, the largest single donation in the history of the university, came from a philanthropic foundation established by the family of T.H. Chan, a Hong Kong real estate developer who died in 1986. Harvard President Drew Faust called the donation "transformative" and said it will help tackle the "most urgent and intractable challenges" in the area of public health.

In a rarity for the university, the Harvard School of Public Health will be renamed the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. The only other school within the university to be named for an individual in modern times is the Harvard Kennedy School, named for John F. Kennedy.

Harvard officials said the \$350 million gift from The Morningside Foundation is unrestricted and will be managed by the Harvard Corporation as part of the university's overall endowment. It will be targeted to help students and faculty working to stop pandemics such as Ebola and malaria, cancer and obesity and to address global health threats stemming from war, poverty, environmental hazards and failing health care systems.

"We can apply it to the priorities of the moment and those priorities that are likely to evolve because public health is a very dynamic field," said

Julio Frenk, the school's dean.

A researcher is already involved in trying to trace the origin of the current Ebola outbreak in western Africa, he said, while another is examining how mobile technology can be used to track Ebola patients.

Proceeds from the gift will also be used to expand student financial aid and provide loan forgiveness to graduates who decide to work in underserved U.S. communities or poor countries. The oldest continuously operating school of public health in the world, it celebrated its centennial anniversary last year.

Chan was born and raised in northern China before moving to Hong Kong in the 1940s, according to his son, Dr. Gerald Chan, who attended Monday's announcement with his mother and other family members.

"I think he would have been very pleased ... that the school would be part of his legacy," Chan said in an earlier interview. He described his father as a staunch supporter of education who often helped family friends pay for schooling or study abroad.

The school has more than 400 faculty members and more than 1,000 students, and public health is the most popular secondary field of study, or minor, at Harvard, according to Faust, who said the gift will inspire a new generation of students.

"It tells the world that this is a public health moment," she said.

The largest previous single gift to the 378-year-old university was \$150 million for financial aid given in February by Kenneth Griffin, founder of the Citadel hedge fund management company.

Billionaire philanthropist Hansjorg Wyss has made a pair of \$125

million gifts in recent years to a bioengineering institute.

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