GOOD NEIGHBOR

Dr. Ritabelle Fernandes

Many fundamental skills are first learned through songs. *The Alphabet Song* teaches the foundations of American language, while *Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes* raises body awareness. Now, people can learn key caregiving concepts through song as well.

Dr. Ritabelle Fernandes, a professor of geriatric medicine at University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's John A. Burns School of Medicine, released *Returning Home* on May 10. The doctor's debut album provides key lessons in palliative care to caregivers of those with serious illnesses. Topics — such as pain management, safe swallowing and advanced care planning — are sung about by Fernandes, who is also a qualified music teacher. The Hawaiian-inspired soundtrack is meant to be a helpful and accessible companion to caregivers who often cannot seek education through traditional means out of fear of leaving their loved ones.

"As a professor, I said, 'I'm not going to publish any more of these boring articles that no one reads,'" Fernandes says with a laugh. "I thought to myself, 'One thing I've been challenged with, and something that has always made me improve, is how to conduct training and education in a fun, innovative way.'"

Fernandes, who has taught many caregiver courses through JABSOM, wanted to better her curriculum. Noting that many Polynesian cultures use music as a teaching method, she decided to give it a try.

"One has to find a solution of how you provide training to the caregivers at home so they don't have to leave their loved ones," says Fernandes, who has spent more than 25 years in hospice and palliative care education. "I have always been very passionate about improving access to education, and providing education in a way that will be better received, easier received and more accessible to everyone. And there's nothing like song, so people can stream and can listen worldwide."

The album was largely inspired by Fernandes' own confusing and stressful caregiving experience with her mother back in India. Sadly, her mother, Phil, passed away in 2025.

Dr. Ritabelle Fernandes of University of Hawai'i's John A. Burns School of Medicine created *Returning Home*, an educational album for caregivers of those with serious illnesses. Co-produced by Kristian Lei and recorded at Rendez-Vous Recording Studio with sound engineer Pierre Grill, *Returning Home* is now available on all major streaming services. **PHOTO COURTESY LAURA AGUON PHOTOGRAPHY**

The album is dedicated to her and the name, *Returning Home*, expresses Fernandes' belief that her mother is now at peace.

"I would say that the title is about my Christian faith and that I believe Mama was returning home. It should not be a sorrowful thing," concludes Fernandes. "You should be happy. She's returning home to God. Mama is dancing in the golden gates of Heaven."

Listen to the soundtrack on YouTube (bit.ly/4948kbu), Apple Music and Spotify. For more information, visit fullcircleeducation.net.

— Akira Fitzgerald

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