

2014 R.I. Convention Presentation

Malaria is, without doubt, one of the greatest scourges affecting our world today, and mankind has dangerously underestimated the threat it poses to millions of lives worldwide. In 2006 it was estimated that one third (1/3rd) of the world's population, or 2.3 billion were exposed to the risk of malaria, with 300 million becoming infected with the parasite and 2.5 million dying every year, seventy five percent of them being children under the age of five years. That is approximately 5136 children died daily or nearly 4 per minute.

Today with the distribution of more than 310 million long life insecticide nets and other measures this figure in 2012 has been reduced to an estimated 207 million cases of malaria, resulting in 627,000 deaths of which 483,000 were children under 5 years of age. Graphically that is 1300 children per day or about 1 child per minute dies of Malaria.

Our activities, since the early nineties have been mainly in PNG and the Solomon Islands and since 2005 with Timor Leste. During this time we have seen quite a few changes in the avenues in which we supply our support

In the early days this was in supplying bed nets in a very limited way. We supplied the netting and the local women made the nets. Our resources could never supply the nets needed to cover the populations of PNG and the Solomons. From this dilemma the Adopt a Village program was born, a way in which we could cover PNG and the Solomons one village at a time.

A couple of Rotary Foundation Grants assisted but never to the extent where we could see a dramatic reduction in the incidence of Malaria. That could only come about with the investment of big bucks.

Under the auspicious of the UN the Global Fund was formed to collect and distribute funds from Donor Countries to combat three Diseases which were running rampant through the developing world. These were TB, HIV/AIDS and Malaria. Finally there was a mechanism for developing countries to tackle these diseases in a manner that would bring positive results.

PNG The first round of Funding was handled by the PNG NDOH and with RAM/PNG's help distributed 2,700,000 nets in the four years 05-09 but it was hindered by corruption and tribal/clan infighting and late distribution of funds.

In 2009 The Rotary Club of Port Moresby (RAM/PNG) was asked to become the Principal Recipient for the next round of Global Funding. This amounted to around US\$60,000,000.00 to cover PNG's population with LLINs twice in the period 2010-2014.

Since then RAM/PNG with its partners NDOH, Devine Word University and the PNG Institute of Medical Research have been running the net distribution program. To the end of March 2014 a total of over 5,200,000 LLINs have been distributed and looks on course to reach the Global Fund target by September.

The results have been dramatic, from 1,575,352 cases reported in 2007 to less than 400,000 today. A reduction of almost 75%. There has also been a corresponding decrease in reported deaths from 671 cases to less than 170 today. Have LLINs been effective? You bet they have.

Solomon Islands

Australian Rotarians and Rotary clubs have been involved in numerous worldwide malaria projects since 1990, but it really wasn't until 1997 that thirteen of our twenty three Australian Districts began developing a more national approach to this worldwide problem by agreeing to commit a portion of their DDFs towards a joint "malaria control project:" in the Solomon Islands.

In April 1999 this National R.A.M. program received a major 3-H Grant of US\$525,000.00 from The Rotary Foundation, and approval for two related Matching Grants, each for US\$ 20,000, to be used in funding the supply of 50,000 chemically impregnated bed nets, chemicals and insecticides, environmental rehabilitation, transport, and education and training programmes for the local people. These 3-H and Matching Grants were initially approved of by The Rotary Foundation for malaria control projects in the Province of Guadalcanal, but because of ongoing ethnic unrest, it became necessary to revise our original project in that Province. In May 2000 the Rotary Foundation gave permission for these funds to be used for our revised malaria control project in Choiseul and Western Provinces of the Solomon Islands.

A project of vital importance to the success of this overall malaria control programme in the Solomon Islands was the construction of five Health Centre Microscopist houses to accommodate the specialist microscopists and malaria workers and who better to build them than Australian Rotary volunteers.

In 2002 PDG Peter Thomas obtained another Foundation Grant for \$250,000 to be spent on combatting the increasing cases of malaria in Honiara. The increase was brought about by the interisland movement of infected Islanders visiting Honiara. The funds were spent over a number of years from 2002 until being signed off in 2009. Funds were used for microscopists, residual insecticide spraying of houses and antimalarial education of the general population

The Solomon Islands have also benefited from the Global Fund and The MOH is currently in the process of covering the Islands with nets for the second time. AusAid also assisted with the supply of 17 warehouses for net storage in the outer islands and some more houses for their microscopy clinics and clinicians. Who did AusAid ask to build them? Correct, they came to RAM and once again Rotary volunteers built them. The last house has now been completed.

With the net distribution now under the control of the MOH, RAM has been responsible for launching, through the MOH, a Healthy Villages program to complement the distribution of LLINs. Under this program, villages applying to join the program are given a set of 40, locally purchased tools, consisting of picks, shovels, hoes, wheelbarrows etc. These tools allow the village to dispose of stagnant water and improve general drainage around their village. The only hooker to this program is that the tools are checked periodically and any missing tools must be replaced by the village. Can't have them being used in market gardens can we! To date over 70 villages have joined the program and it continues to grow with RAM providing the funding for the purchase of the initial set of tools. Over \$42,000.00 so far.

The success of the supply of nets, residual insecticide spraying of houses and the healthy village program on Santa Isabel Island has reduced the infection rate to only .4 cases per 1000. Not that many years ago it was 300 per 1000 The Solomons MOH hopes to declare Santa Isabel Island malaria free next year.

In Timor Leste, RAM has teamed up with the Timorese National Malaria Control Program. From 2008 through 2011 several microscopy units and training were supplied to the NMCP. Our relationship progressed when RAM invited a representative to attend the 2011 RAM Conference. From this meeting came a request to assist with a distribution shortfall they would have in 2011-12. This led to a rather frenzied period of fundraising. RAM would need \$130,000.00 to supply and distribute 20,000 LLINS in the Manatuto district of Timor Leste.

By July 2012 RAM was in a position to order the nets and during October /November three teams of Australian Rotarians and Rotaractors assisted in the distribution.

At the RAM Conference last year the Timorese NMCP requested our assistance in two projects. The first was to supply 42,700 LLINs to provide each expectant mother in Timor a net to protect herself and baby. The second was to cover the shortfall in the last round of Global Funding for 7,500 LLINS for the Maubara District. We looked at the bank account and found we were way short in funds. RAM had the ability to supply only 20,000 LLINS so we bit the bullet and ordered them. The nets were delivered early October and the expectant mothers program began.

Someone suggested we apply for a Global grant for the balance and so the project was launched. From September it took nearly three months to get five districts to agree to part with some DDF Funds to make the application possible. After a long delay in getting some of the required paperwork from Timor, the Grant application was finally submitted in March, and now we wait.

Whilst canvassing districts to be part of the Grant, I was talking to the District RAM Chair of a NSW District outlining my request for funds. During the conversation I mentioned that we didn't even have enough in funds for a small distribution of 7,500 nets in Maubara. He asked if his District could have naming rights to the Maubara project if his District picked up the shortfall.

What do you do? After some persuasion, probably about, two seconds. I agreed but did he have the funds necessary, over \$20,000.00. No problems was the reply, the district treasurer was holding over \$22,000.00 in the District RAM Account that had been collected from Clubs over the last couple of years and not sent on to RAM. Rotary works in mysterious ways.

The nets were ordered and I am pleased to report that this distribution was carried out during May with a team of Rotarians from D9650 and D9790.

It was during my meeting with the Timorese Malaria Control Program Manager that the WHO representative to the Timorese Malaria Program released the information that the NMCP program had been so successful that the official malaria infection rate had been reduced from 220+ per 1,000 in 2006 to 0.9 per 1,000 in April 2014.

With this result, Timor Leste is directing its efforts towards Malaria elimination and RAM is delighted to have been part of the success to date.