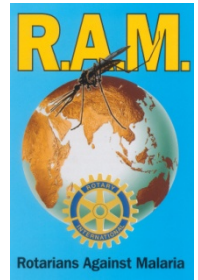




## Rotarians Against Malaria Conference 2015

22<sup>nd</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2015, Brisbane.



The 2015 annual RAM conference was held at the Riverglenn conference centre in Brisbane on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2015 and attended by 48 District RAM representatives, RAM project managers, RAWCS leaders, malaria researchers and interested Rotarians. Guest speakers included Mr Leo Makita, PNG National Malaria Control Program and Mr Alby Bobogare, Director Solomon Islands National Vector Borne Disease Control Program. The Conference agenda included updates on progress in the countries where RAM has active programs, reports on the progress of malaria research from several institutions, the RAM AGM and discussion sessions where future directions for RAM were advanced. The Conference was attended by all five Regional Coordinators and thirteen of the twenty one District Chairs.

### Conference Opening.

The Conference was opened by Immediate past National RAM Chairman Phil Dempster who welcomed delegates and summarised RAM's achievements over the previous twelve months including ongoing programs in PNG, Solomon Islands and Timor Leste as well as promotion of World Malaria Awareness day, selection of the first RAM scholarship PhD student and the Rotary Ride around Australia fund raiser conducted by Steve and Doreen Carroll. These achievements are detailed in the RAM Annual report to RAWCS which will be posted on the RAM web site and published by RAWCS.

### Summaries of progress in countries where RAM has been active:-

#### Papua New Guinea: report from Tim Freeman RAM PNG.

Tim commenced his presentation by reviewing RAM's involvement in PNG since it's inception as a project of RC Port Moresby in 1997. He noted that treated bed nets were first trialled in PNG in 1987 and RAM commenced supplying them to the private sector on a revolving fund basis supplying about 40,000 nets per year from 1997. RAM continued to be the procurement agent for nets funded by the Global Fund (GF) and distributed by the National Dept. of Health (NDOH) from 2003 to 2009. During this period 2.3M nets were supplied resulting in coverage of 80% of the population. From 2009 RAM took over the distribution role as well and since then 7M more nets have been distributed covering the 22 Provinces and all 89 Districts at least twice and resulting in a 75% reduction in disease incidence in some regions. (So, to date RAM has so far been involved in supplying >9M nets in PNG).

Tim reported that the average all up cost of a delivered net is US\$6:17 which compares to a retail price of \$10. Tim described the logistical and administrative difficulties that must be overcome to achieve these great results. He went on to report that the latest round of GF funding to PNG represents a 30% reduction which has resulted in changes to the future net distributions including:-

- No further distribution in areas above 2000m elevation

- Areas with low disease incidence which are urban or easily accessible will only receive nets if the family includes children under 5YO (under 5's are 14% of population).
- Normal distributions will continue in the most highly endemic areas in PNG.
- New programs funded by RAM include 'Chasing Malaria' and private sector retail supply of LLINs and Mosbar.

Tim described how 'Chasing malaria' is currently a pilot program in NCD and Central province based on improved tracking of malaria cases confirmed by RDTs. Infected patients record their addresses and are given a new net, case clusters can then be identified and investigated to determine if other interventions can reduce the incidence in those locations. The private sector initiatives recognise that the retail price of a net can be as little as a day's wages and with increasing malaria awareness the public can self-help to keep their families safe. Tim emphasised the continuing strong cooperation with the National Malaria Control Program (NMCP) and the NDOH and it's importance in achieving and sustaining the reductions in malaria. He noted that in 1997 malaria was the biggest killer in PNG and that it is now the eighth.

#### **PNG NMCP: Mr Leo Makita.**

Leo described malaria as one of the greatest public health challenges in PNG particularly affecting children under 5YO and expectant mothers. He noted that the PNG Institute of medical research had charted significant reductions in the disease but that there were inconsistencies across the provinces. He then described a five stage program to eliminate the disease including:- Control Phase, Consolidation Phase, Pre-elimination Phase (with ,1 case/ 1000), Elimination Phase and Prevention of re-introduction.

Leo commented on the increasing importance of sustained Public Private Partnerships PPP's with RAM being historically the most significant. He stated that the current plan was to have PNG in the elimination phase from 2025 with universal access to LLINs, good diagnosis and accurate treatment being fundamental to achieving this along with new tools, better monitoring, evaluation and tracking and a strengthening of the National health systems.

#### **Solomon Islands: report by PDG Wayne Morris.**

Wayne noted that since 1995, when RAM was launched in the Solomons that more than 180,000 LLINs had been distributed before this task was taken over by the GF. In addition RAM and Rotary had expended more than \$250,000 building clinics, microscopist houses, staff houses and warehouses for the net distribution. More recently RAM's work has focussed on the 'Healthy Villages' program to provide tools to villages to enable them to keep their villages free of mosquito breeding areas. Wayne described how villages apply to the health promotion director and that RAM works in close cooperation with the National Vector Borne Disease Program (NVBDP) to supply tools to villages with approved programs. Tool packages include brush knives, axes, flat files, spades, mattocks, metal rakes, crow bars and wheelbarrows at an average cost of A\$1750.

Wayne noted that the first tools were provided to 30 villages in 2013, a further 38 villages had been provided with tools in 2014/15 at a total cost of A\$106,000. Currently a further 81 villages have been approved for tools at an expected cost of A\$142,000 . Wayne reported that the program used in conjunction with LLINs had been very effective in assisting Isabel province to achieve pre-elimination status and that feed-back from villages had been very positive.

#### **Solomon Islands National Vector Borne Disease Control Program: report by Director Mr Alby Bobogare.**

Alby reviewed the situation in the Solomons reporting that along with malaria the NVBDP was working to control dengue in the population of 674,000 distributed in nine provinces covering 900 islands. Alby praised the

long and good working relationship he and the NVBDCP had enjoyed with RAM and the GF and reported that since 2014 the Australian Government DFAT had been assisting with elimination programs in Temotu and Isabel provinces. Further that Western Province had been scheduled for elimination programs starting in 2017.

Alby reported that there had been problems with communication, logistics and transport, maintenance of assets and accommodation for health staff and that the previous central administration had contributed to lengthy program delays. As a result, Alby noted that program management was being devolved to the provinces along with 58% of the NVBDC budget.

Alby praised RAM's work on the Healthy villages program and suggested that RAM might consider assisting with construction of staff houses in remote parts of the Western Province to assist with the proposed elimination programs.

#### **Timor Leste: report by PDG Phil Dempster.**

Phil reported the arrival of 22,700 LLINs completing RAM's agreement to supply 42,700 LLINs from October 2013 to July 2015 to ensure every expectant mother in Timor Leste has a net to protect herself and child from the malaria mosquito. This brings to a total of over \$400,000 that RAM has provided to cover shortfalls in Global Fund allocations to Timor Leste since 2012. Phil reported that it had been difficult to re-establish contact with Timor's NMCP since Program Manager Maria Mota had been on maternity leave and commented that further efforts will be required to determine the next RAM project there.

#### **Indonesia: report by George Mills D9650 RAM Chairman.**

George reported that on several business trips to Indonesia he had met with Rotary Clubs in Jakarta and Medan and discussed RAM's project activities with Rotarians who had expressed strong interest in creating similar projects within Indonesia to assist with malaria control and other vector borne disease such as dengue. George had also met with Australian DFAT officials in the Jakarta embassy to explain RAM's interest in assisting cross border cooperation to work towards the goal of eliminating malaria on the island of Timor and perhaps Papua.

As a result of these contacts RAM has been invited to present at a District Conference in Java in May 2016.

### **Reports on RAM related activities in Australia.**

#### **RRAAAM: Steve Carrol D9670 RAM Chairman.**

Steve and Doreen Carrol reported that the ride around Australia had raised nearly \$30,000 to support malaria control in PNG and that they had recently travelled to PNG and Solomons at their own expense to investigate the most effective way to assist. RRAAAM / "Operation Buzz Off" has been registered as a separate RAWCS project 44/2014-2015 but has the same goal as RAM. During the ride they presented to over 1200 people and 87 Rotary Clubs during 36 presentations. In addition, they took part in 3 TV interviews 1 Radio show and had 5 Newspaper articles written about the ride and its aims and were afforded 3 Civic receptions as well as laying a wreath at the Australian War Memorial Canberra. Steve strongly suggested that RAM coordinate a public awareness campaign around Malaria Awareness Day with activities connected across Australia.

#### **Rotaract Project: Michael Shields Rotaract Immediate Past National Chairman and Malaria Project leader.**

At the 2011 Rotaract Australia National Conference malaria elimination was adopted as Rotaract's National project. Michael related that eliminating malaria was a goal that was considered achievable in the lifetimes of most Rotaractors and resonated as a tangible practical outcome that they could help achieve. Using slides and U-

Tube Michael and Rotaractors Teresa and Chris showed the passion and creative thinking that can be applied to fund raising and awareness including enlisting corporate sponsors such as Westpac. They reported that Canberra Rotaract alone had raised \$5,000 during the past year.

Rotaract then presented a cheque for \$ 10,911 to assist RAM's active field programs.

#### **D9820 DG partner's project: Christine Williams.**

Christine described how she had adopted the 'Healthy Villages' project in the Solomons as her project during the current year whilst husband Merv serves as D9820 Governor. Working closely with D9820 RAM Chair Tom Shanahan, Chris has devised a brochure and presentation which she will deliver at every club in the district this year highlighting the practical self-help nature of the project.

#### **Induction Kit for new RAM Chairs: Roshni Thattengat RAM Central Region Coordinator.**

Roshni displayed the various elements of RAM history, background briefing, science, up-to-date statistics and practical tips and guides that she had incorporated into an induction kit for all new (and old) RAM representatives. This was one of the agreed goals of the 2014 RAM Conference and will be delivered along with a set of basic presentation slides and other resources early in the 2015 Rotary year.

#### **Donations tracking: RAM Fund Raising Coordinator PDG Richmond Manyweathers.**

Richmond reviewed the current donations system based on the RAWCS central accounting system supervised by RAWCS National Administrator Belinda Griffin. Richmond noted that he reconciles the RAM account and personally responds by email to each donor. RAM Chairs were encouraged to ensure that donations were clearly notated with Club or individual name and Rotary District as well as keeping track of donations in their district to check against Richmond's records and to respond to the donors themselves as well.

It was agreed that modifications of the current RAWCS donations page would be requested so that Rotaract could be identified, District could be easily input and payments other than donations could be made.

### **Discussion of future directions for RAM.**

A series of discussion points aimed at assisting in developing future strategy for RAM were suggested prior to the conference and following a brief introduction of the topic on Saturday discussions and consultations were led by RAM Regional coordinators who reported the outcomes on Sunday morning.

- **Review of RAM's mission statement. Led by Roshni Thattengat and Phil Dempster.** Roshni and Phil reported that after an Executive Committee discussion of modifying the mission statement to reflect a changed emphasis to include elimination they had been asked to propose a new wording. They submitted "Rotarians Against Malaria is a volunteer-run organisation working to eliminate malaria." This was discussed with a view to submitting it for endorsement at the AGM.
- **Discussion of possibilities for Corporate Sponsorship. Led by Greg Berry (RAM Coordinator Northern Region).** Greg reported that there was general enthusiasm for RAM to seek corporate sponsorship but that it needed to be done in a coordinated and professional manner. It was agreed that RAM should pursue this in close consultation with RAWCS and RDU as the appointed media and promotions manager.
- **Review of the 'Little RAM Badges' in fund raising and other token RAM badge for sale outside Rotary. Led by Virginia Turner (RAM Coordinator Southern Region).** Virginia found support for a flexible

approach to using the badges in fund raising and, importantly, in awareness raising. Respondents encouraged continued use of the badges and consideration of a similar token to use beyond Rotary circles.

- **Opportunities for Rotary Volunteers to work on RAM programs. Led by PDG Rob Lyons (RAM Coordinator Western Region).** Rob was approached by several people who were enthusiastic to be involved in Rotary Volunteer teams traveling abroad to assist in RAM program work in our focus countries. It was recognised that hands on involvement would lead to energised fund raising back in Australia.
- **Should RAM encourage ARHRF to support more malaria research? Led by Milton Lewis (RAM Coordinator Central Region).** Milton found that whilst the delegates supported the idea of Australian Rotary Health supporting malaria research some delegates suggested that malaria may be outside their scope. Milton agreed to contact Australian rotary Health directly to pursue the possibilities and report back.
- **REMARAG (Rotarians Eliminating Malaria A Rotary International Action Group) relationship with RAM? How to influence RI to focus on malaria post Polio Plus. Led by PDG Richmond Manyweathers (RAM National Fundraising Coordinator).** The huge degree of experience and potential funding that could be applied to eliminating malaria if RI adopted it as the next Global Health challenge following the successful elimination of polio was discussed together with consideration of the effectiveness of REMARAG in communicating and advocating for that outcome with RI. It was concluded that the RAM Executive should seek to energise cooperation and engagement with REMARAG to help achieve the goal.
- **Location, timing and content of 2016 RAM Conference. Led by Dave Pearson (RAM Eastern Region Coordinator and National Chair).** The proposal that the RAM Conference be rotated between easily accessible destinations such as Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne to encourage greater participation by Rotarian supporters and researchers was discussed and further comment called for via the Conference feedback forms. The overwhelming response was that the proposal was supported although it was noted that the extra flight involved would make for greater travel time and expense for RAM's overseas based program managers and National Health representatives.

## **RAM AGM.**

A brief AGM was held at the commencement of conference sessions on 23<sup>rd</sup> August.

National Chairman Dave Pearson reported that the RAM Executive Committee had met on the evening of 21<sup>st</sup> August and determined that the distribution of unallocated donated funds for 2015 / 2016 would be 40% to PNG, 35% to Solomons and Timor Leste, 15% to the PhD scholarship and that 10% would be held for new initiatives.

Dave reported that although an aspirational target for fund raising of \$20,000 per Australian Rotary District had been agreed at the previous Conference there was much work to do to achieve that.

The meeting voted to endorse the new RAM Mission statement which reads:-

***Rotarians Against Malaria is a volunteer-run organisation working to eliminate malaria.***

Dave reported that two nominations had been received for the Deputy National Chair position and in a secret ballot George Mills was elected. Dave then called for nominations for the vacant position of National Secretary and upon nomination Virginia Turner was elected unopposed.

## **Presentations by Researchers on the fight against Malaria.**

### **Professor Denis Shanks, Australian Army Malaria Institute:**

Prof. Shanks once again delivered an entertaining and informative dinner speech comparing the global effort to eliminate malaria to the 13<sup>th</sup> century Hundred Years war between England and France and the current experience of extended time frames to finally eliminate polio. Prof Shanks concluded that malaria elimination is “possible but difficult” and that although a goal of 2030 has been set for elimination there are already weaknesses in national resolve showing up. He demonstrated some significant successes including Chinese elimination programs moving ahead of schedule and several countries (e.g. Argentina) recently being declared malaria free. Prof Shanks called on RAM to continue to promote awareness of and interest in elimination programs in both Australia and our target countries, to contribute to assisting logistics support in Melanesian communities and to promote self-help through purchase of LLINs whilst other elimination tools are developed.

### **Dr Danielle Staniscic, Institute of Glycomics, Griffith University:**

Dr Staniscic presented an update of progress towards producing a chemically attenuated whole parasite vaccine based on Plasmodium falciparum. She described a four stage development program involving human trials where, in the current third stage, the safety, tolerability and immunogenicity in naïve humans is being evaluated. When this is successfully completed the final development stage will examine the protective efficacy of the vaccine in humans. The next stages will test the vaccine survival when frozen and then move on to more thorough tests of the vaccine induced immunity to malaria in humans. Interestingly she reported that initial results in mice and human blood trials suggest that the vaccine, although based on falciparum, will induce immunity to other plasmodium species as well.

### **Professor Tom Burkot, Australian Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine at JCU:**

Prof. Burkot reviewed the global experience in malaria control and the factors that are shaping planning for global malaria elimination. He noted that great progress had been made in rolling out LLINs in Africa in the last ten years with Global Fund spending on malaria reaching US\$ 8.5 billion. Prof Burkot referred to the WHO’s “Global Technical Strategy for Malaria 2016 – 2030” which was adopted by the World Health Assembly in May 2015. He noted that the strategy relies on two ‘pillars’ namely; 1) Universal access to LLINs and IRS, and 2) targeted vector control which will likely come to rely on new tools yet to be developed.

This segued into the introduction of the first RAM PhD scholar Edgar Pollard MSc (from the Solomon Islands) and his research topic “Understanding mosquito flight to maximise malaria control by insecticide impregnated barriers.” Prof Burkot emphasised the need to have a good understanding of the life habits of the vectors so that innovative and flexible controls could be adapted to prevent infection. He described the use of novel insecticide impregnated barriers (IIBs) as another effective control option.

### **Dr Jack Richards, Head of Malaria Laboratory Burnet Institute:**

Unfortunately Dr Richards was unable to attend as his wife gave birth to their second child on the eve of the conference. In lieu of being present he forwarded a series of slides and, on the basis of these and an earlier discussion, Dave Pearson attempted to convey an insight into the programs underway at Burnet. These include

development of a new, cheap diagnostic field test for the G6PD enzyme which causes serious side effects to the very good malaria treatment drug Primaquin in those patients that carry it. Studies are also being undertaken to profile vulnerable proteins in the plasmodium to assist in vaccine development and studying natural immunity development in children. Burnet also supports field work on mapping malaria in Vietnam leading to policy development as well as studies on the development of ACT resistance in the Mekong Valley.

**Pictures:**



Rotaract IP National Chair Michael Shields presenting cheque to RAM National Chair Dave Pearson.



RAM Conference in session.



PDG Richmond Manyweathers.



Judy Richardson, PDG Ian Dyball and Director Solomons NVBDCP Mr Albino Bobogare.