

May 2008

Issue 4

R.A.M. Newsletter

(Australia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Timor Leste)



Chairman's Message

My Rotary friends and friends of Rotary,

Our annual national conference was held in the Brisbane area in mid-May and included a dinner on the Saturday evening. It was a wonderful and successful event with the best attendance recorded to date – 35 present for the conference itself and about 90 for the dinner.

Many items were discussed over the two days of the conference. Briefly, they were as follows:

- Our Vision Statement covering the current 3-year cycle (refer abridged version page 3);
- New Rotarian Steven Cottingham spoke of his personal experiences with malaria including how he survived a number of attacks (refer article highlighting his generosity);
- Dr Diana Hart distributed a progress report on research being undertaken by Lei Hee, one of last year's conference speakers. Lei's PhD project, supported by ARHRF, is "Identification of mechanisms that cause the lung complications in severe malaria." A summary of Lei Hee's report will be included in the August 2008 Newsletter;
- Prof. Dennis Shanks, Director, Australian Army

Malaria Institute, gave a briefing on the work being carried out by AMI. The work includes: collaborating with other similar institutions; research being undertaken with the Vietnamese Army; drug and vaccine evaluation; evaluating the use of repellents and nets; research on Dengue Fever, Japanese Encephalitis and Ross River fever.

- Ron Seddon (RAM PNG) presented numerous points of interest. Some of these were: price of nets is reducing; a high proportion of the PNG population is resistant to current drugs; research has found that only 47% of fevers are malaria; to date nets have been distributed to 50 of 89 administrative districts; every new mother to be given a free anti-natal net – they will be bright pink to prevent re-sale.
- PDG Richmond Manyweathers advised total contributions to Adopt A Village is now \$637,972. He expressed his thanks to all clubs and individuals who have contributed.
- Michael Morrison lead a discussion on World Malaria Day including a suggested strategy (refer separate article);
- PDG Peter Thomas spoke to a paper updating the work being carried out in the Solomon Islands and which includes the current 3H Grant Project (his paper has

- been distributed to all recipients of this newsletter);
- Dinner Guest Speaker, Prof. Dennis Shanks, spoke to the subject, "Malaria Elimination is back on the Agenda after a Generation Lapse: What does this mean for those working in Melanesia?" His address included a history of malaria research in Australia and Melanesia. Of special interest was his explanation of experiments that are to be conducted in Vanuatu with a view to *eliminating* malaria.
- PDG Ian Sayers led a discussion on the draft RAM Procedures Document. Minor changes were agreed. It is intended the document will be implemented from 1 July 2008.
- PDG John McLaren reported on the present situation in Timor Leste. There is much to be done, but Rotary is under resourced there.

The opportunity was given to attendees to raise final points of interest. The points included: improve malaria awareness; advances being made by RAWCS – it is back under control; and the need for names of volunteers willing to work in SI.

Bill Dethlefs
National Chairman

Professor Dennis Shanks (a short bio)

Professor Shanks is currently the Director of the Australian Army Malaria Institute in Brisbane, Australia. Previously he was a US Army medical officer who spent the majority of his military career conducting field trials of new antimalarial drugs in the tropics.

His assignments included service at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, the overseas laboratories of the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in Thailand and Kenya, the Australian Army Malaria Research Unit in Ingleburn, Australia, and the US Army's Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, USA.

Concerned mostly with malaria prevention studies, Dr Shanks has conducted field studies in various rural populations including gold miners in Papua New Guinea, Thai border militia on the Cambodia border, displaced persons in camps along the Thai-Burmese border, tea estate workers of the Kenyan Rift Valley, and Kenyan villages near Lake Victoria.

He performed one of the pivotal efficacy trials for atovaquone proguanil which leads to its licensure as a chemoprophylactic combination and has tested most antimalarial drugs in use today.

Dr Shanks has written more than 100 publications most of which are directly concerned with malaria.

He is a Fellow of the Infectious Disease Society of America, the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine, and the Australasian College of Tropical Medicine.

His awards include the Sir Henry Wellcome Medal of the American Military Surgeons and the Legion of Merit.

(Note: This bio has been included in order to ensure the reader is aware of the high calibre of the Guest Speaker we are able to attract to our Conferences.)

OUR OBJECTIVE

“The prevention of mortality, and a reduction in morbidity and social and economic loss caused by malaria through a progressive improvement and strengthening of local and national capabilities in malaria control.”

Strategic Planning – Vision Statement (Abridged)

Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Timor Leste are the three countries in our particular region of activity in which the incidence of malaria is very high. An incidence level in excess of one in three persons is common, that is, in excess of 300 per 1,000 persons per year. Our overall and long-term target is to reduce the incidence of malaria in these three countries with special emphasis on PNG and SI to less than 80 per 1,000 per year.

The “Adopt A Village” (AAV) Program was initially developed for PNG in June 2004 and extended to SI in April 2005. In all areas RAM operates in conjunction with other appropriate agencies in the provision of life saving treated bed nets and relies heavily on the co-operation of the national health department.

The program is a huge success story, more particularly in PNG as is evidenced by the increasing contributions from clubs and districts both through direct

donations and through Matching Grants, and in the reduction in the incidence of malaria in those villages in which bed nets are in use. The goal is to have every person in every village in PNG sleeping under a bed net within 5-years.

Treated bed nets provide a limited life protection for the recipients. Until an effective vaccine is produced we have the responsibility to ensure the sustainability of effective protection and continuing calls for support for the bed net program can be anticipated until a vaccine is available to all.

The Rotary Foundation of Rotary International (TRF) has granted an enormous amount of money to the cause of malaria reduction in SI. With approval of the latest 3H Grant, funding by TRF is now about US\$1 million. Previous funding by TRF has resulted in the incidence of malaria being reduced to below the target of 80/1,000/year to, in some cases, about 20/1,000/year.

The goal is to successfully complete the latest 3H Grant by December 2010.

Communication to a variety of people has been developed further since 1 July 2007 with the introduction of a quarterly newsletter. All Australian DG's and DGE's are included in the distribution. The first newsletter was distributed at the end of August 2007 with a circulation of about 115; the current circulation in excess of 140. The goal is to achieve a circulation of 200 by June 2010.

Contact with organisations with an interest in the fight against malaria continues. Currently, the organisations include WHO, Queensland Institute of Medical Research, Australian Army Malaria Institute, and others. Liaison also occurs with various research bodies through our own Scientific Advisory Committee. The goal is simply to strive for continuous improvement in our communication for those organisations with a similar interest.

Queensland Institute of Medical Research

A recent message from QIMR Director, Professor Michael Good, mentions that “RAM has been very successful in this field.”

He then goes on to say, “We are also very grateful for the funding we receive from Rotary for our malaria vaccine development.”

Tiny bug could be key to beating mozzies

Experts believe that with climate change, globalisation and increasing international travel, there is a high probability of mosquito-borne diseases spreading to new regions where health authorities are ill-equipped to handle them.

Furthermore, problems with insecticide resistance mean that chemical pesticides have not provided a universal solution to vector control.

Already, north Queensland has experienced an increasing number of dengue outbreaks since 1990, with the 2003/04 outbreak resulting in 900 confirmed cases including four cases of dengue haemorrhagic fever and one death.

To address the emerging threat from dengue, malaria, Japanese encephalitis and

other mosquito-spread diseases, QIMR has commenced a new research program in collaboration with Professor Scott O'Neill and Dr Elizabeth McGraw at the University of Queensland, to develop new control methods to protect Australian and regional bio-security.

According to Dr Peter Ryan, Head of QIMR's Mosquito Control Group, the program will investigate the effects of a strain of the bacterium *Wolbachia* (*wMelPop*) on mosquito behaviour (e.g. biting and mating), how it reduces mosquito life-span and whether it can infect key mosquito vector species.

"There's an incubation period before a newly infected mosquito can transmit an arbovirus to a host," explained Dr Ryan.

"If we can reduce the lifespan of mosquitoes so they die before the end of that period, then we can reduce the risk of infection in Australia."

"Previous research has already shown that *Wolbachia* can infect species of *Aedes* mosquitoes which are global vectors for dengue, so we hope to replicate this among species of *Culex* and *Anopheles* mosquitoes which are vectors of Ross River virus and malaria, respectively."

Source: The above article is included in the No. 69 – Autumn 2008 edition of LifeLab, the newsletter of the Queensland Institute of Medical Research (QIMR), and authorised to be included in this newsletter by kind permission of QIMR Director Professor Michael Good.

DID YOU KNOW

Greek and Roman observers associated the malaria disease with swamps and marshes. They believed that the fever was caused by stagnant waters, and advocated drainage for its control in places like Rome. The name itself is derived from the supposed association with bad air – 'mala aria'.

Source: Malaria Frontline by Tony Sweeney

Congratulations!

Sincere congratulations to PDG Peter Thomas on being recognised by Rotary International with the Service Above Self Award. This award is given to Rotarians who have rendered exemplary humanitarian Rotary service that embodies Rotary's motto of Service Above Self. The award constitutes Rotary International's highest honour for individual Rotarians.

Past President of Rotary International Sir Clem Renouf presented Peter with the award during the District 9500 Conference in April 2008.

Well done Peter!

Congratulations to PDG Bill Dethlefs who also was recognised by Rotary International with the Service Above Self Award. Bill was presented with the award by District Governor 2006/07 Michael Gregory during the District 9600 Conference in April 2008.

A new Rotarian's Generosity

Steven Cottingham was recently inducted into the Rotary Club of Mooloolaba. He lived in PNG for a number of years and has been afflicted by malaria a number of times. Steven spoke about his real-life experiences during the recent RAM Conference.

He has made the decision, through his family trust, "Siassi Family Trust" to support the Adopt A Village (AAV) programme and is hoping his sponsorship will be allocated to villages in the Siassi Rural Area, Morobe Province, PNG.

It is his intention the trust will contribute US\$1,000.00 immediately for their initial donation, and provided they are in a financial position to do so, will commit to sponsoring AAV for a minimum of 10 years. The trust will endeavour to increase their donation by 10 percent each year so that in 12 months time their next donation will be US\$1,100 and so on for the 10 year period.

World Malaria Day

The World Health Organisation has recognised 25 April as World Malaria Day. However, as this date has a different and special significance in both Australia and New Zealand, our recent annual conference agreed we should not coincide with or detract from Anzac Day and suggested we should work towards identifying a suitable alternative date. The week immediately following Anzac Day was seen as a sensible alternative.

The concept of a World Malaria Day – perhaps a National Day in Australia – was discussed. It was thought that such a day could promote awareness of malaria in Australia (and other vector borne diseases such as dengue and Ross River fever) and promote Rotary's endeavours in this field.

Ron Seddon kindly undertook to provide information regarding PNG's World Malaria Day held on 25 April 2008 which included a significant newspaper spread. Chairman Bill Dethlefs, PDG Richmond Manyweathers, and Michael Morrison propose to meet in early August 2008 to further progress how we could implement this proposal in 2009.

Useful suggestions were made during the discussion re the potential use of the media, TV, and internet, as well as possible involvement/support from the Army, RSL, and others.

Contributed by Michael Morrison, D9800

A Simple Courtesy

Individual clubs are free to undertake RAM related or, indeed, any project overseas, in accordance with their autonomy under the Club and Rotary International Constitutions.

Clubs and Districts involved in projects in another Rotary district, including project volunteer teams, are encouraged to advise that district of their involvement or visit.

This courtesy is particularly important for Papua New Guinean and Solomon Islands projects. In both countries, you will be in District 9600, which has 54 clubs in Queensland, 12 in Papua New Guinea and 2 in the Solomons.

An appropriate email to the District 9600 Governor will satisfy this courtesy.

Contributed by PP George McLelland, RC Manly, D9680

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Contributions and comments are welcome.