

Rotarians Against Malaria (RAM) National Conference 2010

Proceedings

Date: Saturday May 15 – Sunday 16, 2010

Venue: St Columban's Catholic Secondary College, Caboolture, Queensland.

Host: The Rotary Club of Caboolture organised the venue, catering and the conference dinner.

Attendance: 31 Rotarians participated in the conference proceedings, up from 27 delegates attending the 2009 conference.

Key Websites: <http://www.ramaustralia.org><http://www.ram.com.pg>

PROCEEDINGS

Saturday May 14.

11:55 Morning session opened

The conference was opened by the conference chairman and National Committee Chairman, PDG Bill Dethlefs.

Chairman's Introduction: Delegates were asked to briefly introduce themselves and the conference program was outlined.

Chairman PDG Bill Dethlefs: In Brief

- The appointment of PDG Peter Thomas as an executive committee member on the Pacific Islands Regional Multi-Country Coordinating Mechanism (PIRMCCM). Peter is the representative of RAM Australia.
- The evening's guest speaker is to be Prof Ron Quinn. Prof Quinn has made an application for a grant of \$61 million to be spent over 10 years collecting candidate drugs derived from natural sources that may be useful in the treatment of a range of tropical diseases including malaria. This initiative is anticipated to be supported by a number of organisations, both potential essential participants and potential end-users including Charles Darwin University, Australian Army Malaria Institute, AusAID, and the Gates Foundation. Prof Quinn is hopeful that RAM will endorse this initiative as a worthy project. Confirmation of our endorsement of the research highlighted by Bill was proposed by PDG Ian Sayers and seconded by DGE Eric Wood.
- Australian Malaria Awareness Day (MAD) as part of the World Malaria Day was considered a success. Radio bites with community radio stations was trialled last year and expanded this year. There is no way of knowing how many stations took up the spots. WIN TV network strongly supported MAD producing a possible total of 200 spots nation-wide.

Adopt A Village, Richmond Manyweathers:

- Adopt A Village (AAV) has raised to date over Au \$80,000 during this year.
- It remains a policy to acknowledge each donor club by email.
- The updated RAM brochure is now available and each district is invited to take a bundle of 300.
- Ron Seddon has bought bundles of AAV packs, one for each district.

Proceedings:

12:20 Solomon Islands, PDG Wayne Morris.

Funding for malaria programs comes from the Solomon Islands Government who provide SB\$ 26.5 million (Au\$ 1.00 = SB\$ 5.75 on May 20th), the Global Fund and AusAID. 361,000 nets are being distributed and Rotary requested to assist with the provision of canoes for use in net distribution.

AusAID is supplying SB\$ 17.8 million. AusAID has targeted the elimination of malaria from two Solomon Islands provinces, Isobel and Temotu (formally called Santa Cruz). At Temotu the infection rate has dropped from 50 per 1000 to 16 per 1000. Issues include, that it becomes important to test people coming to or returning to the islands to halt the return of the disease, the commitment of committees and to blood testing when infection numbers become low (false positive tests become statistically significant).

AAV now focussed to provide tools and training to allow the cleanup of villages to reduce mosquito breeding sites.

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) plans to commence a 3-year malaria control program. One issue here is that JICA does not often collaborate with other agencies.

The conclusion from the results to date is that elimination is possible, but the “when” is not known. It will require sustained government commitment and sustained support of partner groups.

The Health, Hunger and Humanity (3-H) Grant to control malaria in Honiara is nearly finished.

12:45 Pacific Malaria Initiative, PDG Peter Thomas

Peter announced that he has stepped back from his direct involvement in the Solomon’s malaria work, handing over to Wayne Morris. He will still remain involved with assistance on Australian based tasks.

He has accepted an executive role with the Pacific Malaria Initiative, representing RAM on PIRMCCM (Pacific Island Regional Multi-Country Coordinating Mechanism). It is important to note:

- The Global Fund is pushing ownership back onto local people and groups. Previously in-country people had little say in the running of programs. The Global Fund has very large spreadsheets and a lot of other paperwork.
- Stressed the need for communities to take ownership. However the regional structure is difficult because of the large distances between the very small population bases.
- AusAID is happy with Rotary involvement in their program. Rotary has teams on waiting lists who are keen to get up to assist with projects.

- The Global Fund has not allocated funding for malaria education. The 3-H grant has filled this need in Honiara.
- A Rotary budget of SB\$ 2.6 million for building prefabricated sheds and houses has been allocated from the AusAID total.

Chairman Bill noted that most of Peter's expenses are funded by AusAID. He asked that the conference approve funding support for ongoing meeting attendance when required. John McLaren moved to support, seconded by Jackie Gleeson.

13:00 Break for lunch.

13:40: Chairman Bill opens the afternoon sessions and distributes the current AAV future direction statement. This can be found on the Australian RAM web site: www.ramaustralia.org

Bill explained that an update is required to the PNG part of the statement to reflect the current situation. The following presentation by Ron Seddon would greatly assist to clarify our thinking on this matter.

13:50 Papua New Guinea, Ron Seddon

A Global Fund grant over two phases has been achieved. (Phase 1 funding of US\$23,112,615 commenced November 1 2009 and will end October 1, 2011. Phase 2 will end in October, 2014.) A program of net distribution has now commenced. The nets are not just delivered to districts but direct to each household – 2 nets per household and 2 persons under each net.

An extra 100,000 nets (single nets) have been allocated to vulnerable groups, including HIV-Aids carriers, prisoners and to boarding schools.

Pregnant women are particularly at risk and a series of pink nets are being distributed for this groups use. (It is not customary for men to wear pink and so it is hoped that men will not take pink nets.)

- It is important to note that although long life insecticide treated (LLIN) nets can, in theory, last 7 years however in practice assuming a 3-year life is more realistic.

To appreciate the speed of the distribution program, an aim was to distribute 95,000 nets within the first three weeks.

The Global Fund is a performance based grant and will dry up if performance targets are not met. To this end RAM has employed an experienced African to run the net distribution program.

Adopt A Village (AAV): We need to continue to raise funds for AAV even though bed nets are now provided by the Global Fund. After ±3 years nets will need to be replaced and the Global Fund is unlikely to be there to do this. During this same period the population's resistance to malaria will have diminished leaving it very vulnerable to a malaria epidemic. RAM will need to have funds available to supply replacement nets. Ron suggested that a portion of AAV funds go into savings for future net provision. Currently the RAWCS account for nets is about \$500,000 but ±\$14 million will be required.

The message to take back to clubs is that AAV is a long term commitment and accumulating funds for future use is a key aspect of AAV.

Additional comments were:

- Lihir Island is looking at elimination of malaria (Lihir Gold Ltd has a very large mining operation on Lihir Island).
- In the future malaria control along the West Papua border with PNG will be an issue as we have no control over the Indonesian side of the island.
- Commitment to AAV is long term. We cannot give up on it or a lot of people will die (from a resurgence of malaria).

Questions followed:

Q. What about the mortality rate in PNG?

A. It is coming down.

Q. Is it fair to say that the AAV funds are to provide tools etc, not just saving for bed nets?

A. Yes, but we need to reserve a high proportion of the funds for bed nets.

Q. Are we focussing too much on nets?

A. There are a number of nets being sold. When the net gets damaged people should be looking to buy a new one rather than wait for a handout.

Q. What proportion of villages has been adopted? Maybe send out reminders that villages will be up for new nets.

A. The PNG RAM web site (www.RAM.com.pg) keeps track of net distribution. About 17% - 18% of villages have been adopted. Net distribution goes on a region by region basis not to separate villages.

Comment: Although there is no problem raising money for AAV, some clubs have a problem with donating funds that go into savings rather than being used immediately.

Chairman Bill pointed out that in general terms this is similar to how The Rotary Foundation manages our donations both for Annual Giving and Polio Eradication. Mention was also made to the dollar reserves held by Australian Rotary Health.

Conclusion: That we will require future funds for bed nets and we just have to sell the concept of saving for future purchases. We need to promote a long term vision. Also we need to be aware that the costs of net supply will go up substantially as the PNG population continues to increase.

PDG John McLaren offered to prepare, after conclusion of today's proceedings in association with a couple of attendees, a summary that emphasises the need to accumulate funds for the AAV bed net program for incorporation in the AAV Future Direction statement. Feedback to occur during tomorrow morning's first session.

15:00. Leo Makita, PNG National Dept of Health Malaria Manager; Principal advisor to PNGs vector borne diseases group.

The malaria control strategy is the supply of LLIN and internal spraying with residual insecticides, spraying of village surrounds and awareness.

Malaria is the number two killer in PNG after Tuberculosis (TB). (The TB numbers are exacerbated because many AIDS victims die of TB).

Mortality rates from malaria in the '70s were low but increased dramatically with the cessation of DDT application.

Strategy:

1. Vector control - bed nets, particularly treated nets. Treated nets also dramatically reduce district mosquito populations. Overall the mortality has been reduced by 20% and morbidity by 50%.
2. Indoor residual spraying
3. Diagnosis and ACT (Artemisinin-based Combination Therapy) treatment.
4. Awareness and education
5. Operational research - without clinical diagnosis every fever is assumed to be malaria.

Problems include an insufficient number of microscopes for diagnosis and an insufficient number of technicians to man them and government commitment.

15:18 Use of the brand "Rotarians Against Malaria" Chairman Bill

An email received from RI Parramatta was circulated to delegates for discussion. The message was that RAM is not a Rotary International approved name.

Conference considered numerous points put forward by attendees as well as some Past RI Officers.

Conference agreed there were two significant points that support the view that Rotarians Against Malaria is accepted by RI, namely, 1) It is a recognised activity of RAWCS which is supported by all Australian Districts – RAWCS is RI approved; and 2) RI WHQ in Evanston approved the use of name on the malaria booth at both Birmingham and Montreal Conventions.

15:30 Break

16:00 Video: Wendy Stein

Wendy played a video that alerted RAM to the issues in the Trobriand Islands. This island group is situated in the Milne Bay district of Eastern PNG. The people have had no doctor since 1980 and have the second highest child mortality in the world. She is developing a project to rebuild the hospital in Losuia on Kiriwina Island.

16:20 Prof Dennis Shanks, Director Australian Army Malaria Institute

This presentation was on the elimination of malaria in Micronesia with a “hopeful” example of Isabel Island, Solomon Islands.

Introduction:

- A large number of dollars and effort is being expended in trying to survey malaria occurrence over a large number of islands.
- Assisting is AusAID and the Global Fund with the bed net program
- Malaria incidence in the Solomon Islands has been trending down since 2002.
- The health system in the outer islands is less functional.

Isobel Island has been chosen as a start point for elimination because:

- It has a relatively homogeneous population
- Strong Anglican church and solidarity amongst chiefs
- High level of cooperation.

Process:

A survey of 9000 people (1 in 3) was completed using blood smears to diagnose for malaria.

Problems:

- This system becomes less effective when infection rates are low because of false-positive results (at about 1:1,000 this becomes significant at low infection rates).
- It is difficult to control migration of malaria because the islands are not totally isolated. Many travellers go through Honiara, which has high levels of malaria.
- A key time will be in 2011 when AusAID and the Global Fund decide whether to continue effort. Aid supply is performance based.
- Inter-village rivalry will slow progress
- It is hardest to find the last parasite
- When malaria returns it is usually Vivax (which has a dormant stage). Falciparum is more easily eradicated.

16:40 Timor Leste, PDG Phil Dempster

- Timor was initially successful in being granted \$9 million for the fight against malaria. Rotary approached the Timor government with the offer of assistance. This was declined and they said that “everything was under control”.
- Rotary approached the Timorese authorities again later and found out that they would only be getting about 25% of the initially expected Global Funds. The government is now more open to offers of assistance.

- Rotary hopes to get an AAV net provision program up and running through The Ministry of Health.

16:47 Close of Day 1 proceedings

Conference Dinner

Some short speeches and acknowledgements were made to commence the dinner.

The keynote speaker was Prof Ron Quinn. Ron Quinn is Professor and Director of the Eskitis Institute for Cell & Molecular Therapies at Griffith University.

Ron Quinn:

People who live in the tropics are 8 times more likely than others to contract infectious and parasitic diseases and 40% of the world's population lives here. The most important tropical disease in terms of morbidity and mortality is malaria. He discussed the use of quinine (made from the bark of the Cinchona tree, native to Peru) and quinine derivatives (Chloroquin, etc) as an effective cure up until resistance developed in the last quarter of the last century. This treatment was recently replaced by ACT drugs (Artemisinin-based Combination Therapy) however resistance to these is developing along the Thai-Cambodian border.

He introduced *Nature Bank*, an initiative to collect a library of fractions derived from natural substances collected from plants and marine invertebrates in cooperation with the Australian Institute of Marine Science, many universities and the Queensland museum. He is in the process of preparing an application for a grant of Au\$ 61 million to be spent over 10 years to continue the research and acquire more specimens for Nature Bank. He is hoping that we will endorse his work (he is not looking for money from RAM) as having potential for the treatment of malaria.

From a bank, currently housing 45,000 samples around 200,000 natural product samples have been derived. Using computer assisted analysis to support the examination of a large numbers of samples, natural compounds that have an affinity with bio-synthetic enzymes can be identified. That is, that the enzyme can easily lock onto the molecule. Rather than testing hundreds of thousands of compounds for effectiveness in treating specific pathogens in a random fashion the number of true candidate drugs can be quickly isolated by recognising these affinities.

Sunday, May 31.

09:15 Morning Session Opened

John McLaren provided feedback from yesterday's presentation by Ron Seddon and his meeting with a couple of attendees on what was needed to be incorporated in the AAV Future Direction statement. This included, incorporating our objective, that RAM provides leadership, financial and strategic support to implement its mission, and to emphasise that AAV needs to be sustained and guaranteed into the future.

Chairman Bill will proceed to coordinate with the RAM Executive an update to the statement for posting to the web site as soon as possible.

Chairman Bill invited incoming RAM Chairman PDG Ian Sayers to communicate his planned course for RAM during his term.

Future directions, Ian Sayers:

Firstly he acknowledged Bill Dethlefs' achievements during his 3-year chairmanship. These included:

- The RAM newsletter
- The new website
- Membership of the Pacific Island Regional Multi-country Coordinating Mechanism – this group manages the Global Funds in the Pacific region.
- Malaria Awareness Day (MAD)

For the future he has:

1. No intentions of making any big changes
2. To sort out where we are heading with AAV (the new statement will help)
3. The Solomon Islands seems to be going in the right direction
4. Help Ron Seddon with PNG work
5. Good news on progress with Timor Leste, this will open up new avenues of work
6. Widen support for RAM activities, particularly with drug companies
7. RAM to become more involved with Australian Rotary Health
8. Would like to see more post-graduate research supported by RAM
9. Could district reps let him know who they are and let him know about any newsletters.
10. Aim to hold the RAM conference in Caboolture once more next year.

A representative from Caboolture Rotary advised their club would be happy to host the RAM conference next year.

PDG Rob Wylie noted that Australian Rotary Health can match RAM funding for a PhD scholarship or a research grant

Tim Richards asked if RAM supported him to approach mining companies for financial or other assistance by giving them presentations. This was accepted.

It was suggested that significant contributions to RAM be recognised by some sort of award.

National Executive Committee effective from July 2010, Bill Dethlefs

Chairman – PDG Ian Sayers

Deputy Chairman – PDG Phil Dempster

PNG Liaison – PDG Richmond Manyweathers

SI Liaison – PDG Wayne Morris

SI Liaison Assistant - PDG Peter Thomas.

Scientific Advisory Committee Liaison PP Diana Hart has withdrawn from this responsibility. It was recognised that a new scientific advisor need to be sort.

DG Walter Buchanan moved that the new National Executive Committee be accepted. Phil Dempster seconded.

Wayne Morris will act as alternative to Peter Thomas on the PIRMCCM. Peter Thomas to make the necessary arrangements.

Chairman's Transitional arrangements, Chairman Bill

- Ian and Bill have agreed to timing of transfer of information.
- Web site transferred to Ian Sayers control by no later than 9 August.
- All other matters gradually from 1 July.

Other Matters in closing:

- National RAWCS has proposed that an annual gathering of Regional Coordinators for each activity should occur annually. The conference recognised that this proposal would be detrimental to Regional RAM Coordinators particularly as they would then not have the benefit of significant input provided during the annual national RAM Conference. It was requested that the national RAWCS Board members present communicate this view at the appropriate time.
- Work to get Federal Government recognition of MAD
- Funds could be made available to assist districts promote MAD
- Ron Seddon advised that Vestergaard is increasing its MAD sponsorship by \$500 next year and possibly increasing the amount by a further \$500 each following year
- Build a sample kit of banners and other promotional material. Once a standard kit is settled on produce >20 for district distribution.

Final Session

Confirmed that Caboolture will be the venue for next year's RAM conference with Incoming Chairman Ian noting that the weekend of 14 & 15 May 2011 is his preferred date.

This will be preceded on the morning of day 1 of the conference by a Northern Region RAWCS meeting.

Many general comments on the meeting were made by delegates - all positive.

It was noted that Ron Seddon is producing a 30-minute RAM video. This should be circulated to all clubs.

Peter Thomas gave a vote of thanks to Bill Dethlefs for a job well done.

11:11 Conference closed