

ROTARIANS AGAINST MALARIA - A Community Statement

World Malaria Day and Malaria Awareness Week

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recognises April 25 as **World Malaria Day**. Because this conflicts with Anzac Day, 30 April has been selected as **Malaria Awareness Day** in Australia with activities occurring during the week commencing 26 April.

Malaria is a disease that has been with us for thousands of years. Its name stems from the Italian *mal aria* (bad air); it was also known as Roman Fever thought to originate from the marshlands surrounding Rome. Over 500 million people are affected by malaria every year with up to 2.5 million deaths occurring; a majority of these deaths involve children under five years of age and pregnant women. A child dies every 25-30 seconds. *Each and every day of the year the number of deaths from Malaria exceeds the total number of deaths resulting from the tragic 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre.*

Australia was declared free of malaria by the WHO in 1981. Nevertheless 700 to 800 cases are reported each year involving travellers returning to Australia from infected areas, or visitors to our country from such areas. These can include Papua New Guinea (PNG), the Solomon Islands, Timor Leste (East Timor), Vanuatu and South East Asia generally.

The malaria parasite is carried by the Anopheles mosquito which is a tough adversary. In 1960, the WHO assessed only 10% of the world's population to be at risk of contracting malaria. Subsequently this rose to 40%, because mosquitos developed resistance to pesticides and malarial parasites did likewise with respect to treatment drugs. The loss to the economies of third world countries, both at government and local levels, and the strains placed on their limited medical services, are enormous.

The WHO has developed world wide support for the fight against malaria, with significant funding received from Governments and private Foundations. Notable amongst these are the United States Government, the British and Australian Governments, the Gates Foundation, The Rotary Foundation of Rotary International, Rotary clubs, and the Global Fund. This funding provides support for research into the development of vaccines and the establishment of malaria control programmes around the world. These programmes have included the development and use of treated bed nets which have been shown to be over 70% effective in reducing the incidence of malaria in those areas in which they are able to be used.

Rotary in Australia developed the "Adopt a Village" programme (AAV) in 2004, initially for PNG but extended it to cover the Solomon Islands in 2005. It relies heavily on the cooperation of local National Health Departments and the input of Rotarians from both around Australia and within local communities. Its success in PNG has resulted in some areas of the country becoming virtually free of the disease. In the Solomon Islands the AAV has achieved a reduction in the incidence of malaria from 330 cases per 1000 head of population to 80 cases and in some areas to as few as 20 cases per 1000 people. Malaria remains a major problem in Timor Leste and RAM continues to look for ways in which it can assist the authorities in relieving the suffering it is causing.

RAM acknowledges the monumental effort spearheaded by Rotary in the quest to eliminate polio. We seek to complement these efforts in making the world a safer place for all.

The continuing provision of treated bed nets to malarial endemic areas requires financial support. Your assistance with Rotary's humanitarian endeavours would be greatly appreciated. For further enquiries contact Bill Dethlefs at dethlefs@hotkey.net.au or mail your donations to Rotarians Against Malaria, PO Box 198, Caringbah, NSW 2229.