

Rotarians Against Malaria

Annual Report 2007-2008

It is with a considerable degree of pride and pleasure that I present this annual report. The high level of dedication and commitment by those Rotarians and their friends from around Australia who join together in their fight against this dreadful disease continues to be maintained at the highest standard.

Our stated objective is, “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.”

Our National Structure was altered with effect from 1 July 2007 to better reflect current activity. It has an anticipated 5-year time frame with a review recommended after three years.

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 Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands 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.

Total contributions to AAV currently total approximately \$650,000. We sincerely express our thanks to all districts, clubs, and individuals for their ongoing support.

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 Health, Hunger and Humanity (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.

The Australian Government, through AusAid, is directing a large amount of money into the *Pacific Malaria Initiative* in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, with the ultimate aim of malaria elimination. Rotary has been requested to assist in the implementation of the infrastructure

component of that project, utilizing RAM and RAWCS Project Volunteers. This is a tremendous vote of confidence in RAM and recognition that we have the skill and capacity to run such a program. Funds from AusAID and The Global Fund will provide complete bed net coverage of SI and Vanuatu by the end of 2009, thus allowing RAM to direct all contributions towards our work in PNG where the problem is still enormous with only about 60% of the country netted.

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 just under 115. The circulation has since increased to 150 at 30 June 2008. The goal is to achieve a circulation of 200 by June 2010. We are aware that a number of districts are posting the RAM Newsletter to their website so it is possible that the readership already exceeds our target. Districts are requested to seriously consider posting this newsletter to their website.

Contact with organisations with an interest in the fight against malaria continues. Currently, the organisations include the World Health Organisation, Secretariat of the Pacific Community (covers 22 Pacific Islands and territories), Queensland Institute of Medical Research, Australian Army Malaria Institute, Griffith University's Eskitis Institute for Cell and Molecular Therapies, the Rotarian Action Group – Rotarians Eliminating Malaria, 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 with organisations with a similar interest.

It should be recognised that we also encourage research projects by directing, from time to time, available funds to worthwhile research projects.

A very successful RAM Conference was held mid-May at Caboolture on the northern outskirts of Brisbane. A best ever attendance at both the conference itself and at the Saturday evening dinner with about 90 people attending is a fitting recognition of the work carried out by RAM and the significant success it is achieving. Professor Dennis Shanks, Director Australian Army Malaria Institute, attended all of the Saturday Plenary sessions and was the Dinner Guest Speaker.

The World Health Organisation has recognised 25 April as World Malaria Day. As this date has special significance in both Australia and New Zealand, we consider the week following Anzac Day is a practical and sensible alternative. Strategies are being developed to enable all 23 Australian districts and nearly 1,200 clubs to participate in whatever way they choose in April 2009 and beyond.

A Procedures Document has been developed with an effective date of 1 July 2008.

We have decided to develop our own stand-alone website. Pre-development planning commenced towards the end of June. It is anticipated the actual site development will commence in early September 2008.

Bill Dethlefs
Chairman 2007-2010
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