

Rotarians Against Malaria

Annual report 2016 – 2017

Over the last 15 years great progress has been achieved in the global fight against malaria. In addition to a 62% reduction in the annual death rate since 2000 and a 41% reduction in reported cases, 17 countries have eliminated the disease since 2000. This year has seen steady progress toward the WHO goal of eradicating malaria by 2040 with Sri Lanka and Kyrgyzstan being declared malaria free and declarations for Argentina and Paraguay expected soon. Great progress is also being made in reducing the mortality rate in our near neighbours with a 58% decrease recorded in the western Pacific Region since 2010. Rotarians Against Malaria (RAM) has had an active role in PNG and the Solomons, since 1995 and more recently in Timor Leste, significantly contributing to these results.

In PNG recorded malaria deaths have fallen by 76% since 2009 when RAM became the principle recipient of the Global Fund PNG malaria grant and now RAM will continue as the sole principle recipient for the next round in 2018. This program has seen RAM distribute more than 9 million bed nets since 2009 and a further 1.2 million nets to households this year plus 180,000 to vulnerable groups. Every household in PNG has received at least two allocations and RAM is currently working on the third with universal coverage assured by additional nets allocated by the Against Malaria Foundation.

RAM funds raised in Australia are employed on the Chasing Malaria Project which is trialling strategies and approaches that will be required to drive malaria rates down to elimination levels in areas of current low malaria incidence. Working closely with the PNG Dept. of Health in the target provinces, RAM ensures accurate record keeping so that all cases are mapped and malaria clusters are identified for follow-up. Where required, RAM supplies diagnostic test kits and drugs to the clinics as well as bed nets. All positive cases are given a family sized net and all expectant mothers also receive a new net under this program. This year two more container loads of nets were sent to PNG to support this initiative.

Where malaria case clusters are identified, Ross Baibuni (RAM's Manager of Community Based Malaria Control) and his team recruit local volunteers and work with the local schools to teach the students about malaria and mosquito life cycles and to search out all the mosquito breeding sites around the cluster location. Breeding sites are mapped by GPS and regularly checked, when they are active (i.e. contain mosquito larvae) specific strategies are developed to destroy the larvae. These include draining or filling, introducing fish to eat the larvae or spraying larvicide. Local households are informed of the risk and the presence and use of bed nets is checked.

In the Solomon Islands RAM has continued to support the Healthy Village program run by the Health Promotions Unit of the Ministry of Health, by providing sets of tools to enable villages with approved plans to carry out local earth works and cleaning programs to reduce the incidence of mosquitoes around the village. To date 139 villages have been supported the latest being in Guadalcanal Province and the Russell Islands. RAM also supports PhD candidate, Solomon Islander Edgar Pollard, in researching mosquito movement around villages in order to design modern effective barrier screens.

A team of RAM Rotary volunteers returned from Timor Leste in June with the exciting news that malaria control has been so effective there that the National Malaria Control Program and WHO are now planning to achieve malaria elimination in the next five years and that they value the ongoing support of RAM as a significant partner in this process. The latest bed net distribution is taking place in the Oecusse enclave with 40,000 nets funded by the Global Fund and logistical costs met by RAM.

RAM has also commenced funding the Rotary Club of Dili Lafaek “Healthy Villages” project in Dili and Liquica districts. To date twelve villages have participated in this trial project which encompasses Community health and hygiene awareness training, establishing Community Committees, planning health interventions and building permanent rubbish disposal facilities, aimed at reducing mosquito breeding as well as improving village hygiene.

Back in Australia, RAM has strongly supported RABS project 16-2016-17 aimed at raising sufficient funds to support the next stage of human trials of the promising malaria vaccine candidate PlasProtect®. The project was launched by Governor General, Sir Peter Cosgrove and Lady Cosgrove at the Institute for Glycomics, Griffith University in March and was attended by over 200 people including many distinguished Rotarians and Academics. This a Rotary Zone wide fund raiser aimed at accelerating the vaccine development with funding of \$500,000. RAM considers that this vaccine could be a game changer in the campaign to eradicate malaria and may provide the key to a future RI supported global immunisation program.

In 2015 it was decided that future annual RAM Conferences should be rotated between Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney to make it easier for more Rotarians to attend and be inspired by the malaria challenge and RAM’s programs. This year’s conference was held in Melbourne with a strong local attendance and great feedback was received. The 2017 Conference will be held in Sydney at ‘Rowers on Cook’s River’ on 19th and 20th August. Significant research developments, project outcomes and planning sessions will be featured.

Rotaract, through their national malaria project, continues to be both inspiring in their approach and a great support to RAM. Two Rotaractors, Michael Sheilds and Holstein Wong have served on RAM’s Executive Committee this year making strong contributions.

Looking ahead, 2017/18 promises to be an eventful year as Timor Leste pushes toward eliminating malaria, the Chasing Malaria program in PNG is expanded and the Institute for Glycomics moves closer to perfecting a viable vaccine. RAM continues to support field programs in all three countries striving toward malaria elimination and we understand that maintaining active malaria control and awareness is crucial during the all-important elimination phase.

David Pearson
RAM National Manager

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