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## EDITORIAL

### HIV and AIDS

*What cannot be cured,  
must be eradicated...*

In our lifetime, we have seen the eradication of smallpox, many victories in the antibiotic campaign against bacteria and the development of vaccines against polio, hepatitis, measles and rubella. Now the new menace: AIDS, which threatens the entire human race.

The number of people infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) continues to grow worldwide. Estimates by the World Health Organization indicate that at least 10 million adults and a million babies have already become infected with the virus. Estimates of the extent of the problem in Papua New Guinea are difficult to make. Countries such as ours which have a predominantly rural population and an overburdened health system are at a greater risk of not being able to contain the spread of HIV infection.

AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) is a disease where the role of prevention cannot be overemphasized, since there is no cure as yet. The containment of AIDS is not only the responsibility of the medical fraternity but also of the community as a whole. A change in our attitudes towards the patients and their families afflicted by this lethal illness is vitally important, as are efforts to increase the awareness about the disease amongst health workers, teachers, members of the church, policy planners and decision-makers in the government, and, above all, the population of the country as a whole.

This focus issue of the Papua New Guinea Medical Journal is dedicated to the subject of HIV and AIDS and is a collection of some of the papers presented during the Thirty-first Annual Medical Symposium in Port Moresby in September 1995. The communications address a variety of issues ranging from highly technical ones concerning the virus and its transmission to social aspects of the disease and the approach of various agencies which are part of our daily lives, such as the church. I commend the range of these reviews, reports and other communications and hope that they will receive

wide attention. We will soon all have to learn how to care – confidently, competently and compassionately – for those members of our community who are suffering from AIDS. The description of a deeply felt initial encounter with an AIDS patient, already published as a prize essay (1), was also presented at the Symposium, and I hope that this too will be widely read. Our struggle is just beginning. Under the present circumstances and with the current levels of knowledge about the disease, in the words of Winston Churchill, “the battle is going to be long, it is going to be hard, but we must not withdraw”.

Every country has its culture, traditions and beliefs and it is only appropriate that the specific answers to the burning issues raised by AIDS are discussed at in-country meetings such as the Medical Symposium and attempts made to find specific solutions that are relevant to the individual situation in Papua New Guinea. The contributions from doctors, scientists, nurses, social workers and the church are acknowledged. The beneficiaries of this exercise will ultimately be the people of Papua New Guinea.

It is in this spirit that this issue of the Papua New Guinea Medical Journal on HIV and AIDS has been published. The issue is a large one and we could not have published it without the financial support of the United Nations Population Fund. I take this opportunity to thank UNFPA for sponsoring this focus issue of the journal and, in particular, Ms Margaret O’Callaghan for her continued interest and support.

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#### REFERENCE

- 1 **Atua V.** The mystery lady in Room Four. *Uni Taur* 1995 Oct 13:9.