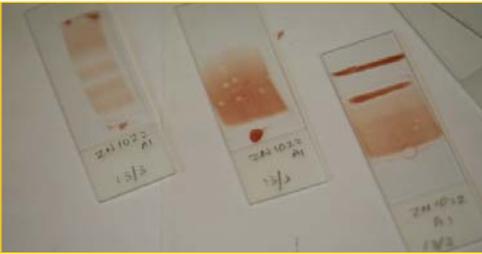




IMR NIUS



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NEWSLETTER OF THE PNG INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL RESEARCH

Its Pink for Breast Cancer awareness



Pink Morning Tea 2013 held at our Head office in Goroka, EHP. The event was a huge success.. See story on page 3.

2014 scholarships

Five Masters scholarships to study in the US are now available for interested Papua New Guinea graduates.

These Fogarty International Scholarships are funded by the Global Infectious Disease Research Training Program (GIDRTP).

They are open to any interested graduate in medicine or biology from any university in the country who has a passion for medical research.

The Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research (PNGIMR) in collaboration with Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland Ohio, USA and the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG – School of Medicine and Health Sciences) are offering these scholarships.

Successful applicants will be attached with either Case Western Reserve University or Michigan State University in the USA to complete the requirements for a Master's degree by course work and research.

The two-year program will begin next year and end in 2016.

The Fogarty International Scholarship program will pay for the full cost of the program.

This is an opportunity to work within an international network and contribute to creating an effective change to the health of our people in Papua New Guinea.

There are two rounds of selections for interested applicants.

The first round of selections was closed on 16 December while selections for the second round of applicants will close on 21 January 2014.

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Seasons
Greetings

Director's Message

More challenges for IMR in 2014

2013 was pre-focused as the year of implementation of major projects, specifically infrastructure developments. However, it has been a bumpy ride for us.

Funding woes and political standoffs were major humps restricting us from fully implementing our plans. The recent political standoff between the National Government and PNGSDP has forced us to stop the developmental works for the planned K20 million state-of-art laboratory complex in Madang. This facility was a major infrastructure project undertaken between IMR, the government and PNG Sustainable Development Program. We are now looking at other possible funding avenues to assist us fund the building of the facility. In addition, the government has not increased its annual budget allocation for us. The same share given this year will be maintained next year, which means that 2014 will be a bit rough.

While things do not seem to be gleaming on the corporate affairs side, the scientific front has thrived. The roll-out of the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) in PNG in November was a major highlight of our research work this year. This was the end result of five years of PCV research work between IMR and our collaborators both national and overseas. This achievement also further highlights IMR's goal – to improve the health and wellbeing of Papua New Guineans through health research.

We have also completed a lot of research projects; with new ones to start next year with research grants being secured for these projects. Apart from research, there has also been a steady stream of publications from IMR published in many international medical journals. This is one way where we get to disseminate the finding of our research activities and share information with our stakeholders both in the country and overseas.

For the staff, in 2014, I would like to challenge you all, especially researchers to produce more publications upon completion of research work. We must publish our work. It would be great to also see our young researchers becoming more active in this too.

With that, I would like to sincerely thank all our collaborators both in PNG and overseas for working in partnership with us this year. We look forward to further strengthen our collaboration with you all in 2014.

My sincere gratitude also go out to all the hardworking staff at all IMR branches for your tireless efforts and contributions this year.

I wish all of you and your families a safe Christmas and I look forward to working with you in another challenging year, 2014.

Sincerely,
Professor Peter Siba



Professor Peter Siba

"For the staff, in 2014, I would like to challenge you all, especially researchers to produce more publications upon completion of research work. We must publish our work."

Staff News

Departing Staff

Dr Johanna Wapling joined the Institute on the 2 May 2011 as a research fellow.

She was attached with the Malaria Laboratory based in Goroka and has dedicated her time and efforts in ensuring that the Malaria lab was functioning efficiently as well as spending time to assist and train Papua New Guineans and also harnessing and creating cordial working relationship with our international collaborators.

Dr Paul Horwood is returning to Australia for Christmas and then taking up a new position in Cambodia after almost four years at the Institute. He initially came to join the Institute in February 2010 as a Research Fellow in the Infection and Immunity Unit and over the years stayed on to be the first Head of the Environment and

Emerging Disease Unit. This unit from its humble beginning has seen it grow and expand its research scope.

He leaves behind very dedicated and committed staff who will pursue the interest of the Institute.

In the meantime, Dr Yazid Abdad is the acting head of EEDU.

Relocation

Dr Andrew Vallely, Head of the Sexual and Reproductive Health Unit and his wife Lisa Vallely, Section head of Maternal Child Health have been relocated with their family to our new branch in Alotau. They will be the senior staff on site to lead the research team there.

Bat surveillance: IMR on disease control

A bat surveillance exercise was recently conducted in Madang to identify potential diseases in bats that might be of threat to humans.

It was a joint effort between four government agencies including PNG Institute of Medical Research (IMR), National Agriculture and Quarantine Inspection Authority (NAQIA), Department of Agriculture and Livestock and Madang police.

"This is the first of more similar surveillance exercises to be conducted in other bat populations around the country over the next few years," said Dr Yazid Abdad, Head of Zoonoses and Neglected Diseases section at IMR.

This section was recently formed to investigate diseases that are passed to Papua New Guineans from animals and the environment. "The aim of the surveillance work is to understand better the bat ecology in PNG and also identify any potential zoonoses so that we may become better prepared in case of an outbreak," Dr Abdad said. It has been well documented that bats are carriers of various diseases that have recently caused epidemics worldwide such as coronaviruses (SARS and MERS), influenza viruses and rabies.

"Bats and flying foxes are common in the coastal areas of PNG and so it is vital to understand the role they play and the effects they have on human health," said Sinafa Robby a staff member from the Zoonoses and Neglected Disease section.

Apart from bats, other surveillance exercises are also being conducted to investigate other animal populations that have close ties to human.

Information gathered from this surveillance will be used to introduce



IMR staff from the Zoonoses section carrying out a Bat autopsy while members from NAQIA looking on.

and formulate health policies with the National Department of Health to further improve the health of Papua New Guineans.

Zoonoses are diseases that humans can contract from wild or domestic animals. Neglected diseases are diseases that are overlooked due to focus on other more serious diseases. Some examples of zoonoses and neglected diseases include hookworm infection, lymphatic filariasis (elephantiasis), dengue and leptospirosis (Weil's syndrome).

To find out more about the Zoonoses Section and the studies that are being carried out, visit our website www.pngimr.org.pg

Recruitment for HIV Co-infection Study in Port Moresby ends



Dr Everlyn Lavu (back), Director of Central Public Health Laboratories (CPHL) with Pamela Toliman (front) of IMR cutting the cake during the end of the study party.

Determining the aetiology or causes of illness in HIV-positive people in PNG is vital. At PNG Institute of Medical Research (IMR) we are conducting an HIV Co-infection Study which aims to establish the aetiology of respiratory, diarrhoeal and febrile illness in HIV-positive people in PNG.

One of the recruitment sites for the study was Port Moresby where recruitment of HIV-positive people into the study took place at the Heduru Clinic and Ward 4B of Port Moresby General Hospital (PMGH).

In PNG, this study was done in collaboration with PMGH, Heduru Clinic, Central Public Health Laboratory and the Microbiology Section of the PMGH Pathology Department.

Recruitment in these sites closed in June this year, and close to 100 HIV-positive people were recruited.

A small afternoon tea was held earlier this month to acknowledge those who provided support for the study in Port Moresby.

Pink Morning Tea a success

Healthy Women Healthy PNG (HWHPNG) hosted another successful Pink Morning Tea event on the 31 October.

This annual event was held on the last Thursday in October to raise awareness and to support the Well Woman's Clinic at Goroka General Hospital.

HWHPNG is an advocacy, not-for-profit group made up of female IMR staff at all branches. The aim of the group is to provide awareness on health issues affecting women in PNG and also to raise funds to support the Well Woman's Clinic.

This clinic provides sexual and reproductive health services to women in Eastern Highlands and surrounding provinces including screening for cervical cancer.

It is estimated that cervical cancer kills approximately 1500 Papua New Guinean women every year.

VIA to address cervical cancer in PNG

By Yvonne Haij

The visual inspection with acetic acid (VIA) treatment for cervical cancer is expected to bring hope to PNG women, especially those living in the rural areas.

This was revealed by VIA Study Coordinator, Josephine Gabuzzi, and Mt Hagen Site Coordinator, Joyce Allen, during a two day symposium hosted by the Sexual and Reproductive Health Unit to discuss the units' current projects. The symposium was held on December 5-6 at the Institute's headquarters in Goroka.

Ms Gabuzzi anticipates that VIA could be carried out in health centers to help rural women and cut down on hospitalization and deaths caused by cervical cancer.

This AusAID-funded study which began in February, will end next year, and hopes to address the health burden caused by cervical cancer, the biggest killer disease among PNG women.

Currently, cervical cancer claims up to 1,500 women every year in the country because most are diagnosed very late.

While findings are yet to be finalized, Ms Gabuzzi said VIA was a good way to detect and treat cervical cancer in its early stages.

It is also a conducive and viable method that can be applied into PNG's health settings.

"Many types of health care providers could perform the procedure and it may also be possible to integrate VIA screening into primary health care services," she said.

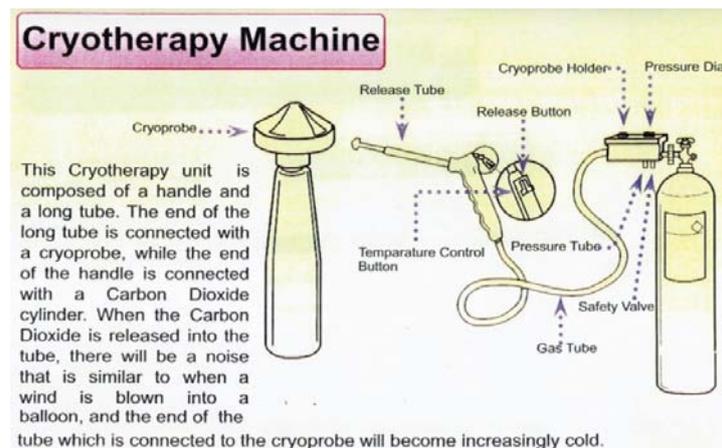
"Using VIA for the treatment and early detection of cervical cancer is good because it is simple, has an easy-to-learn approach that is minimally reliant upon infrastructure, and requires low start-up and sustaining costs."

"Unlike pap smears, VIA test results are available immediately and require only one visit to the clinic."

However, there are also many setbacks to conducting VIA, which she highlighted as well.

These include:

- most women do not return for review after being tested positive for cervical cancer;



An illustration of a cryotherapy machine.

- lack of proper equipments to carryout VIA in health facilities such as no sterilizing machines, speculums or trays to do the procedure;
- Communication difficulties including difficulty in translating English concepts accurately to Tok Pisin, and;
- more training needed for health workers performing VIA and cryotherapy.

VIA has been already implemented in India, Fiji, African countries, Thailand and many other low resource and developing countries and has been proven successful.

Women between the ages of 30-50 years are eligible to participate in this VIA study.

The hospital-based study is being conducted at the Well Women's Clinics in Goroka and Mt Hagen.

To find out more about the VIA Study and other studies being conducted by our Sexual and Reproductive Health Unit, visit our website www.pngimr.org.pg

Induction exercise promotes efficiency

Staff induction exercise is vital as it helps to educate as well as inform staff of the different units at IMR and their roles.

Speaking during the second staff induction exercise held for IMR's Madang staff, IMR Director Professor Peter Siba, said for a large institution, staff induction is vital as it helps staff to be aware of these different units and ultimately maintain the consistent flow of work at the Institute.

"It is important that staff were aware of all processes and channels in place so that they could be efficient and confident in their work," said Professor Siba.

He said with past inductions, only senior staff attended and this resulted in most of the junior staff not understanding the roles of other units.

"This induction has brought together all staff which is good because we all need to understand and know what is done, and be familiar with the roles and responsibilities of each unit," he said.

"Information is lacking in all branches, so making staff aware of all processes in the Institution will allow the system to flow freely."

The induction was held at the Coast Watchers Hotel on November

22 for IMR Madang staff while a similar one was held at the Aldolf Saweri Lecture Theatre in Goroka for Goroka staff.

The induction exercise was initiated by the Human Resources Unit and involved mostly the staff working in the different units of the Corporate Affairs and Support Services (CASS) Department of IMR. Human Resources Manager Denver Kave said staff inductions are vital as it allowed staff to understand the roles of the different CASS Units.

There are 10 support units under CASS that work behind the scene to support the core business of IMR which is to conduct medical research into the health problems affecting Papua New Guineans.

These support services include Finance, Procurement, Communications, ICT, Laboratory Management, Central Administration, Building and Maintenance, Library, Transport and Training.

The induction was an eye opener for many staff, mostly new staff members, and it also gave them the opportunity to ask questions.

The Corporate Affairs and Support Services (CASS) Update

with Samson Akunaii, Deputy Director for CASS



Maprik VSAT establishment

Telecommunication will no longer be a hindrance to operations at our Maprik branch following the recent installation of a Digicel VSAT system in November.

It is hoped that the new VSAT system will greatly improve communication at the branch. The branch has in the past suffered from an unreliable communication system and it has over time caused much inconvenience to both staff and research activities on the ground.

There are several malaria-related studies currently in progress at this site and all are done in collaboration with our partners from Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) of Cleveland, Ohio.

The establishment of the new VSAT system will greatly enable easy communication between Principal investigators from the University and the operational staff on the ground.

A team of technicians from Digicel PNG helped to install the new system.

Volunteer provides helpful technical support to Finance Unit

Liz Elmer, an Australian Volunteer International (AVI) and has been placed with the Institute for a twelve-month assignment.

Liz is an industry-experienced accountant with a strong background in human resource management and her placement at the Institute's Accounts Unit has been timely and welcoming.

Over the last few years the Accounts Unit has struggled to get its accrual accounting concept into operational mode due to inadequate software suppliers in the country.

During her short stint she will assist our accounts staff to develop strategies to address some of the critical challenges the Institute is facing and especially in respect to the manner in which the finances of the Institute are managed.

This includes reviewing the existing Peachtree accounting system and moving towards adopting an accounting system which will meet the financial management needs of the Institute and its wider stakeholders.

As part of this exercise, refresher training programs are being conducted for accounts and project management staff on the basic fundamentals of accounting.

The efforts of management to make key information available to PI's and project managers will be realized soon once the upgraded accounting software is fully operational next year.

Upgrading of Casper Payroll System

One positive aspect resulting from the initiatives undertaken by Liz was the upgrade of the Casper payroll system for the Institute. This was followed by some training provided by a specialist based in Port Moresby. The Institute has negotiated a good deal with an Australian (Cairns) based company who has an office in PNG. The advantage of this is that the Institute is assured of professional ongoing support locally and online.

With the upgrading, all existing and new staff have been asked to fill out new personal information forms and the information will be entered into the upgraded payroll database which will commence

in the new year. The HR exercise will also include integration of the HR records with the payroll records so all the HR information is kept on one database which can be accessed online by project Principal investigators and project managers with ease.

The efforts of management to make key information available to PI's and project managers will be realized soon once the upgraded accounting software is fully operational next year.

2014 – Core Budget from Government

The 2014 budget allocation by the Government to the Institute is disappointingly same as the 2013 allocation of K 7.7 million.

Based on current trends and considering the inflationary factors the Institute had estimated a K 13 million allocation would be needed but unfortunately we have been allocated the same level of funding as in 2013.

The 2014 budget allocation simply does not take into consideration inflationary factors and will cause some discomfort to our operations in 2014 and so we all need to be made aware of these challenges that will be faced in 2014.

Again our 2014 Development Budget also did not receive favourable consideration in the budget handed down by the Treasurer. We were only given a K 4 million allocation which is broken down as follows;

- Ongoing Madang infrastructure works K 2.8 million
- ICRAS K 0.2 million
- Replacement of Aging equipment K 1.0 million

The highly successful ICRAS program did not receive due recognition from the Government and sets back our efforts to promote national capacity content and expertise in accessing research grants to pursue research agendas of interest.

Efforts will now have to be made with the Prime Minister's office on his commitment of K5.1 million during his visit to the Institute recently. The K 5 million is a one off discretionary funding support to the PNGIMR in 2014 whilst the K 100,000.000 funding is an annual funding commitment the Prime Minister made to the Medical Journal of PNG as long as he is at the helm of the government.

Launching of the Alotau Branch

Alotau is now one of the Institute's fully fledged operational branches. This marks an important milestone for IMR as it becomes the first branch for the southern region.

The launching was held on the 19 September 2013 and was witnessed by key dignitaries from the Milne Bay Provincial Health Authority (MBPHA) and the local community of Alotau.

Speakers from the MBPHA spoke about the need for ongoing dialogue on the research activities undertaken in the province so as to avoid surprises and misunderstandings. Our Director Professor Peter Siba and the Acting Chairman of the Council Professor Sir Isi Kevau assured that Provincial Health Authority that the key to a successful working dialogue can only come from regular dialogue and this will be a key aspect of the Institute's involvement and work in the province.

Story continues on page 7

The Custodian of IMR work - Our Archives



Dianne Kunit and Jeffrey Kapata in the Michael Alpers Library.

By Joanne Wayang and Geraldine Vilakiva

Recording and preserving of materials whether it be visual, verbal or written is essential in any work and most importantly with research.

At the PNG Institute of Medical Research (IMR), we take pride in our diverse yet up-to-date archives collection.

Located inside the Institute's Michael Alpers Library in Goroka, the Archives is the custodian to more than a thousand collections of IMR research materials, dating back to 1917.

This collection includes published and unpublished research articles, publications, research data, administrative and management records such as meeting minutes and biological specimens.

Even copies of our quarterly newsletter are archived too!

Because we take archiving seriously, we have practices in place to ensure our archiving is done in a discreet manner and is up to standard.

Before any material finds its place into an archive box, it goes through the processes of accessions, inventories, series and provenances – simply to verify which category of documentation it is appraised to.

Currently our archive uses the Heritage

Documentary Management System (HDMS) to process archival documents.

Although archiving can be a painstaking, dirty and dusty job; it is a crucial one too.

More importantly it can be a very reliable source for referencing of past research records by current researchers at IMR and even other researchers in PNG and overseas.

The Archives is the result of years of work done by very few committed and determined staff over the years, one in particular is Dianne Kunit, our Archives officer.

She was trained by an Australian International Volunteer, Wydia Paul, who originally set up the archives for the Institute. Mama Dee as she is affectionately known at the Institute has been our Archivist for the last 10 years and is the force behind the upkeep and operation of our Archives.

From Upper Bena, in Eastern Highlands Province, she started with the IMR 16 years ago, 10 of those years were spent in the Archives Section.

During these years, Dianne was also fortunate to undergo training as part of her career development program.

One of these trainings was the Records and Management Archives Course in which she successfully completed Modules 1-4 of the course.

"More importantly it can be a very reliable source for referencing of past research records by current researchers at IMR and even other researchers in PNG and overseas."

"That training was very interesting and fun. The fun part was instead of being a student, at times during the training I also assisted in facilitating," she recalled.

After working this long at IMR, Dianne says she is happy so far with her contribution to research at the Institute and is looking forward to retiring soon.

With the expansion of research work at IMR, there is also the need for more spacing to store Archive information. It is a race with time to archive information.

Head Librarian, Jeffrey Kapata says there are already long-term plans for the Archives to venture into digital archiving.

"Digital archiving is intended to ease

Story continues on page 7

SNAP SHOT

from the Archives



The oldest piece of Archive material in our Archives.
The Nature Journal, March 1971, No. 2470, Vol.99



Continued from page 6

accessibility or retrieval of archived records," he said.

It is a new concept which he anticipates will resolve the problem of storage spacing and also improve the pace in researching and accessing information. Whether or not Dianne works long enough at IMR to witness this transition does not really bother her, as she is quite content with her input in this section over the last decade.

To find out more about our Archives or how to access our facilities in our Michael Alpers Library, visit our website www.pngimr.org.pg

The CASS Update

with Samson Akunaii, Deputy Director for CASS



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2013 Interns

This year a total of 10 young interns joined the Institute as part of its annual internship program. The 10 interns, comprised of six females and four males, from the University of Papua New Guinea. They are undergraduate students in their second and third year respectively from both the school of Natural and Physical Sciences and the School of Medicine and Health Sciences. Their placement is for a period of six week. They commenced on the 11 November and will finish off on the last day of work which is December 20.

They are attached with our respective scientific units and projects in both Goroka and Madang. The ten interns have been placed as follows : Tracey Tanumei (Immunology Unit – Goroka), Ellanor Miroi (PiH – Madang), Felix Paran (HIV / STI Lab – Goroka) , Glen James (Malaria Control – Goroka) , Douglas Patiliu (Immunology – Goroka) , Moses Maniura (PiH – Madang), Annas Kapman (Immunology – Madang), Donella Omena (HIV / STI – Goroka), Doreen Ugaia (Bacteriology – Goroka) and Rose Anne Wale (Entomology – Madang)

Honours and Masters Program

The current 2013 Honours students (Tilda Orami, Nola N'Dewei, Joe Jude and Benishar Kombut) are nearing completion of their honours program. They have completed all assessments and are working on their final thesis for submission to UPNG by mid December 2013. For the 2014 Honours Program, all applications received have been screened and are now awaiting UPNG to confirm admission status of the applicants. Once finalized, we shall make known the Honours students for 2014.

For Masters, no suitable candidates have been identified due to limited applications received. We will re-advertised to source potential applicants later on. On that note, only four out of the five Master's students under the Master's Program completed their studies and graduated in the first quarter of this year. The students who graduated were Pamela Toliman, Dr Paul Harino, Dr Regina Wangnapi and Dr Maria Ome.

CASS to participate in Weekly Seminars in 2014

The Corporate Affairs and Support Services (CASS) will start participating in the Institute's Weekly Seminars beginning next year. The aim of this is to educate staff about the roles of various units under CASS. The CASS inclusion in these seminars will also extend to the other branches as well in the future. The Training Unit has been tasked to accommodate the CASS input with the seminar organisers next year. The Institute's weekly seminars are mostly scientific-research oriented and are held on Wednesdays each week at the Institute's Goroka and Madang branches.

Dates for Christmas and New Year

The Institute closes its offices in all its branches at midday on 24 December 2013 for Christmas and re-opens on 6 January 2014. Staff are encouraged to spend the Christmas with their loved ones and friends and stay out of trouble during this festive season. The management of the Institute acknowledges the support of each and everyone and wishes each one of you and your respective families a very merry Christmas and a happy and joyful 2014.



Training Nius

Training Nius is compiled by Dickson Kuvi (Training Officer) and John Yogiyo (Assistant Training Officer). Phone: +675-531 4259.



An astronaut going through safety drills before take-off? No, it's our Occupational Health and Safety chairman for Madang Branch, Absalom Mai, in action at the Bio-safety and Bio-security training in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Pictured is Dr Wanny Basuki (right), explaining to Absalom (centre, wearing suit) the importance of using a Personal, Air Protection Respirator, inside a BSL-3 laboratory during work with infectious pathogens.

The week-long training was conducted by the Eijkman Institute for Molecular Biology in Jakarta from 6-12 November.

See full story below.

Workshop

Advance Bio Statistics Workshop

A four-day Advance Bio-statistics workshop was held from 18-21 November. The workshop was mostly attended by scientific staff working in studies that have available data to analyse.

Facilitated by Dr Connie Li Wai Suen from the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute in Melbourne, the workshop covered theory, practical and one-on-one consultation with participants regarding their data analysis.

It also covered the different computer practices of using STATA – a software that analyses scientific data.

A total of 14 participants, mostly current and former Honour's and Master's students and including senior scientific staff from the Goroka, Madang and Port Moresby branches attended.

The workshop was a follow-up to the Epidemiology and Bio Statistics workshop which was held previously in September.

Short Training

Biosafety and Risk Training

Occupational Health and Safety Chairman, for the Madang branch, Absalom Mai, recently attended a week-long Bio-safety and Bio-security (BIORISK) Training in Jakarta, Indonesia.

The training was conducted by the Eijkman Institute for Molecular Biology in Jakarta from 6-12 November and covered both theory and practical on bio-safety and bio-security principles.

This included laboratory acquired infections, bio-security and dual-use research of concern, classification of micro-organisms based on risks groups, bio-aerosols and minimizing aerosols in the laboratory, use of biological safety cabinet, waste management, decontamination and sterilization, risks assessment and bio-preparedness response to bio-threats in the laboratory.

After this training, Absalom will be responsible for organising in-house seminars and workshops in 2014 to disseminate the information and update respective staff in various branches at IMR (especially the OHS staff) on areas that can be improved on.

Culture and Sensitivity Training for Laboratory staff

Laboratory staff at IMR's new Partnership in Health Laboratory and Central Public Health Laboratory (CPHL) successfully completed a culture and sensitivity workshop training.

The four days training was conducted early this month in the new laboratory in Port Moresby.

This training aims to support current research into enteric diseases conducted

at the Port Moresby laboratory by the Emerging and Environmental Disease Unit. It is also vital for the lab staff attached to the Sexual and Reproductive Health Unit as there will be a new study commencing next year in Port Moresby which will require the skills in culture and sensitivity.

This new study will be investigating antimicrobial resistance patterns in *Neisseria gonorrhoea*.

A total of seven participants attended the training – four from the IMR and three from CPHL.

Graduate Program

2013 Honours Students

Four Honour's students currently studying under the PNGIMR/UPNG training program have completed all assessment and will be submitting their final thesis this month (December).

They are Benishar Kombut, Nola N'Drewei, Tilda Orami and Joe Jude.

2013 Summer Interns Students

Ten undergraduate students have joined us from the UPNG School of Medicine and Health Sciences, and School of Natural and Physical Science. They are now attached with the different IMR units and will submit reports on their work by 20 December. Their summer internship adds to their final year's credit points.