



Tobias Maure educating teachers at Forapi Primary School on the life cycle of different harmful bacteria. This was part of a small awareness carried out by Tobias and his colleagues during their visit to the Forapi community to get consent and collect stool samples from children in the community.

## First winner of PM's award

By Joanne Wayang

**Dr Moses Laman has become PNG's first winner and recipient of the prestigious 2015 PNG's Outstanding Person of the Year award at the inaugural Prime Minister's excellence award.**

Just thirty-six years old, this young medical doctor who hails from East Sepik has shown outstanding research work as a senior medical research officer with IMR Madang.

He won the award because of his research on reducing illness and death among underprivileged children in rural PNG.

"IMR has been in the country for 50 years, working to improve the health situation in the country", he said.

"We have multi researchers, foreigners and nationals. This award is the recognition for all the researchers who have collaborated

to work together. I thank you for this award", he added humbly as he received his award from the Prime Minister Peter O'Neil during the ceremony at the Taurama Aquatic Centre in Port Moresby on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2015.

On the same note, Dr Moses Laman also received the Deans award from the University of Western Australia prior to this award.

He received this award following his thesis which he produced while completing his Philosophy Doctorate (PhD) in medical sciences.

The Dean's Award is indeed a rare award which is only given to a fraction of thesis classified as Passed by the University of Western Australia.

Dr Moses Laman is already a success story in his own right and is a mentor to many young Papua New Guineans in the medical field.

## Contents

- 2 Director's Message  
-Cars on Tender
- 3 10 million grant for new research award
- 4 -NCD study ends  
-News in Brief
- 5 Symposium moments
- 6 Training News

# Director's Message



**Professor Peter Siba**

Hello All!

Once again we've neared the end of another busy year at the IMR. This is our *3rd Quarter* of the *IMR Nius*.

So far this year, we've had recognition from various organisations and institutions for many of our hard working staff who have continued to inspire and put the institute out there for the world to recognise.

We have also received a 10 million grant for a new research award for maternal health. You will read more about it in this issue.

Our Non-Communicable Diseases Study has wind down with many interesting results which i'm sure it will be worth reading about.

We've also attended another successful 51st Medical Symposium in Port Moresby hosted by the Women Doctors Association. Some of our staff who presented during the Symposium received well deserved awards and we congratulate them on their achievements.

Otherwise, it's heads down and tails up for the institute until we reach the end of the year.

Until the final issue of *IMR Nius* 2015, happy reading!

## IMR cars on tender



Mathias Ulka (Middle black shirt) hands over the car keys to a representative of Labels Goroka while his colleagues look on. From left to right: Allan Gedion, two representatives of Labels Goroka, Mathias Ulka, Sasah Tangabo and Morris Sinivei

Congratulations to Mr William Koi and Labels Goroka for being the highest bidders for two vehicles of IMR.

Two cars that were part of the PCV study of IMR Goroka were tendered off.

It was organised by the IMR internal tender committee for a public tender meaning to external bidders.

IMR received many bidders for ZMR055 but the highest lucky bidder was the clothing company-Labels Goroka who out bid the others and got the car for K38,500.

The proud new owners received the car keys from Mathias Ulka, the man in charge of the transport section of the IMR while emotional colleagues looked on as the car was part of the family and also the study for a long time.

# 10 million grant for new research award

Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research announces major new research award in maternal health.

To coincide with the 51st Annual Symposium of the PNG Medical Society on "Advancing women's health through innovation", the PNG Institute of Medical Research today released a press statement announcing a major new research award.

The Institute has been awarded funding under the UK-based Joint Global Health Trials initiative to investigate point-of-care testing and treatment of sexually transmitted infections to improve pregnancy outcomes in high-burden, low-income settings.

The Joint Global Health Trials initiative was established by the UK Department for International Development, Medical Research Council UK and the Wellcome Trust to support cutting edge research on the most important health priorities facing low- and middle-income countries.

The trial will be led by Dr Andrew Valley (Professorial Research Fellow) and Dr William Pomat (Deputy Director, Science) at the PNGIMR, and involves over 20 senior researchers and reproductive health experts based in PNG, Australia and in Europe, including Dr Grace Kariwiga (Alotau Provincial Hospital), Prof Glen Mola (University of PNG / Port Moresby General Hospital), and Prof Peter Siba (PNGIMR).

"This study addresses a critical knowledge gap – we know that curable sexually transmitted and genital infections such as chlamydia and gonorrhoea are very common among pregnant women in PNG and in other low-income countries, but we also know that these are very difficult to diagnose and treat because the majority of infections are asymptomatic.

Earlier research has shown that chlamydia, gonorrhoea and other genital infections during pregnancy can lead to serious problems if not treated, including preterm birth and low birth weight.

New, highly-accurate and easy-to-use technologies for STI testing have recently become available, which can be used by health staff in routine clinical settings. These technologies will for the first time allow us to provide antenatal women with same-day, clinic-based testing and treatment for curable genital infections. This approach has the

**"This prestigious international award will place PNG researchers at the forefront of global research on infectious diseases and maternal health", said the Director of the PNGIMR, Professor Peter Siba.**

potential to dramatically improve pregnancy outcomes in countries such as PNG. This is what our trial is designed to find out", said Dr Valley, the Principal Investigator of the study.

The trial will take place at 12 antenatal clinic sites in three provinces in PNG and will be carried out over a duration of 4 years.

Chairman of the PNGIMR Council, Professor Sir Isi Kevau congratulated the IMR team for successfully been awarded this huge research grant.

The Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research is the lead institute and principal recipient of this award.

Collaborating international institutes include: the Kirby Institute, UNSW Australia (Prof John Kaldor, A/Prof Rebecca Guy; A/Prof Handan Wand; Lisa Valley); University of Technology, Sydney (Prof Caroline Homer); the Burnet Institute (A/Prof Stanley Luchters, Dr Chris Morgan); Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne (Prof Suzanne Garland, A/Prof Sepehr Tabrizi); University of Queensland (A/Prof David Whiley); University of Melbourne (Prof Stephen Rogerson); London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (Prof Rosanna Peeling, A/Prof Virginia Wiseman); and University of Bern (Prof Nicola Low).



Director of PNGIMR Professor Peter Siba, Sir Isi Kevau, Dr Andrew Valley and Dr William Pomat.

## Up coming Events

- \*Pink Morning Tea
- \*World Pneumonia Day Celebrations
- \*World Aids Day Celebration
- \*SIREP

Read more on these events in our final *IMR Nius* for 2015 coming out soon

# NCD Study ends

Modern lifestyle increasing risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease even among rural adults Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) are on the rise in Papua New Guinea according to a study recently completed by the PNG Institute of Medical Research (PNGIMR).

The study, which involved nearly 800 adults randomly selected from communities in the Asaro valley, West Hiri Motuan villages and Karkar Island, found: 18.7% of participants had elevated blood glucose levels, a risk factor for Type II diabetes; 17.7% had elevated cholesterol, a risk factor for cardiovascular disease; and 15.9% met criteria for hypertension.

In addition, a staggering 67.4% met criteria for 'substantially increased risk of metabolic complications' based on their waist-to-hip ratio, 43.5% were anaemic and 43% reported daily tobacco use, a risk factor for cardiovascular diseases and numerous cancers e.g. lung and mouth cancer.

Dr Justin Pulford, a lead scientist on the study, expressed a particular concern for the findings from the Asaro Valley and Karkar Island.

"What I find most concerning about the study findings are the high levels of elevated cholesterol and hypertension found among adults living in the rural areas of Asaro Valley and Karkar Island. Elevated cholesterol and hypertension were almost entirely absent in these communities as recently as the

1990s, suggesting a rapid change in diet and lifestyle has occurred. These lifestyle changes may lead to substantial health problems in mid-to-late life unless effective prevention programs are implemented.

Unfortunately, this does not appear to be happening".

Dr Patricia Rarau, a fellow lead scientist on the study, commented on the implications for the PNG health system.

"I am very worried about the additional burden NCDs will place upon the PNG health system. Type II diabetes requires treatment for life. Coronary heart disease often results in expensive and highly specialised heart surgery.

This type of care is not readily available in PNG and it will require an enormous investment in our health services if we hope to provide effective treatment for all. Our best strategy is to immediately invest in NCD prevention programs before the NCD epidemic gets further out of hand".

The study was completed in collaboration with the University of Papua New Guinea, the University of Queensland, the University of Tokyo and the University of Auckland and was funded by Exxon Mobil PNG as part of the PNGIMR/Exxon Mobil PNG 'Partnership in Health Program'.

The full study report is available on the PNGIMR website (<http://pngimr.org.pg>).

## News in Brief

IMR was one of the institutions who was nominated to receive the Prime Ministers Excellence award this year. Unfortunately Caritas beat us to it and received the award.

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Some of our staff have returned from their studies overseas and are now working at IMR. Refer to the Training Nius for details

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Vele Solomon and Casperia Mond received the Dean's Prize for the best presentation by a student or junior graduate of the School of Medicine and Health Sciences during the Medical Symposium

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The Deborah Lehmann Prize for the best paper on research leading to implementation went to Marilyn Morris during the Medical Symposium

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There was no new life members appointed during the medical Symposium for the PNG Medical Society.

## SNAP SHOT

It is always a nice treat to hear from our former colleagues and friends who have left us. Pictured in this photo is Widya Paul (Middle, Back row) who was a volunteer with IMR-Goroka ten years ago. Widya sent this photo and would like to pass her greetings and love to all her friends who still remember her from back then.



## Symposium moments

### President's Prize



Joycelyn Sapura

Agnes Mek

Joycelyn Sapura is the happy recipient of the President's Prize for the best presentation by a Junior Investigator, during the 51<sup>st</sup> PNG Medical Symposium in Port Moresby.

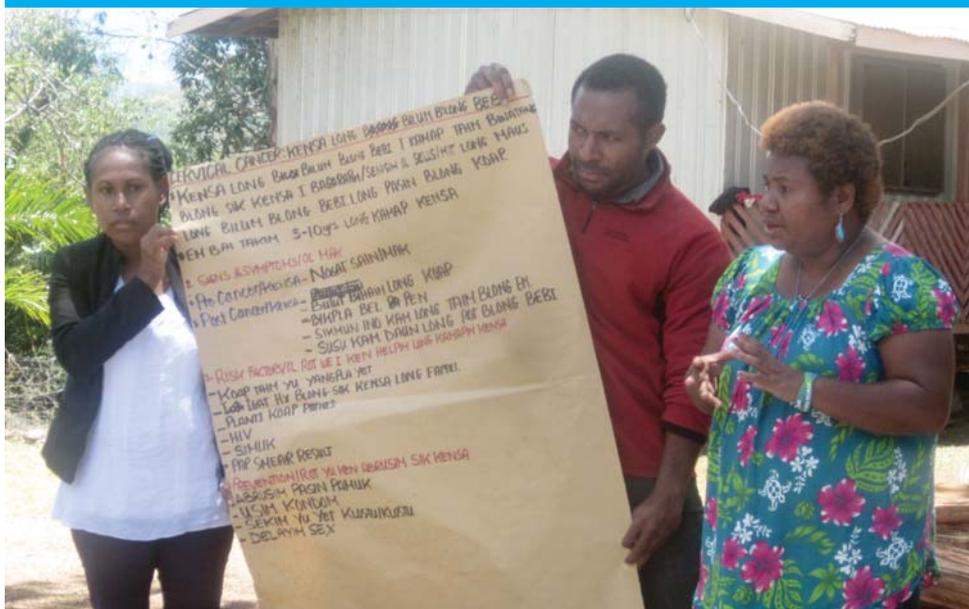
The cash prize was shared by Joycelyn and Anges Mek who is a fellow colleague. Joycelyn's presentation was titled The aetiology of pneumonia and meningitis in hospitalised children from the Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea. Agnes Mek's presentation is on Polygamy, sexual agency and women in contemporary Papua New Guinea.

Joycelyn believes that anybody can present at the PNG Medical Symposium regardless of whether you are in the Health Disciplinary or not. The key to it is that you prepare a well organised and easy to follow presentation.

She said that her PI's deserve all the credit for her award as they prepared her well and did not hesitate to push her to do better at every opportunity. She is very grateful to be working under such supervisors who mentored her to be where she is.

From her own personal observation, she is encouraging her fellow field staff to do presentations at these Medical Symposiums as they have hands on experience with dealing with people and health issues in communities.

## Advocating for Womens Health



Josphine Gabuzzie from the Sexual and Reproductive Health Unit, giving an awareness talk to women at the Gapaina community in Goroka on cervical cancer. She encouraged mothers and young women present to visit the womens clinic for regular check ups as cervical cancer is a big problem amongst women in Papua New Guinea and everyone should be concerned. Giving her a helping hand with her poster presentation were Grace Bande and Tobias Maure.

## Consenting study participants at Forapi



IMR staff from the Environment and Emerging Diseases Unit distributing consent forms to the Forapi community who wish their babies or children under five years of age to participate in their study.

Top: John-Paul Matlam checking a study baby in the Forapi community.

Bottom: Tobias and Grace helping the community to fill out their consent forms.

# Training Nius

## Training Nius Updates

### Staff on studies return to IMR

Many of our staff will be returning soon from overseas training. The ones who have returned are;

Monalisa Kas who is currently based in our Environment and Emerging Diseases Unit, Goroka.

She has completed her Masters in Public Health at the Case Western Reserve University which was funded by Fogarty International. Monalisa is currently working on a new research study which we will find out more about next year.

Sarah Forova Kurumop has also completed her Masters in Social Research and has returned from the Australian National University. She is based with the Population Health and Demography Unit, Goroka.

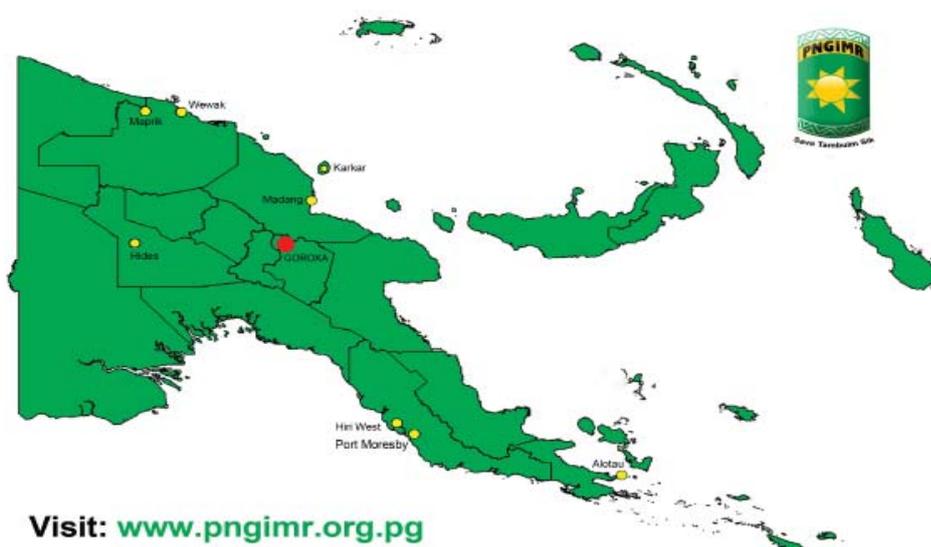
Dr Moses Laman has completed his PhD in Medical Science from the University of Western Australia. He is based in the IMR, Madang.

Janet Gare and Dagwin Suarkia have both returned. Janet is waiting for the final result of her thesis which has been submitted to the Monash University Australia.

Dagwin is currently working on his thesis to submit at the end of the year to the University of Western Australia. Janet is based in the Sexual and Reproductive Health Unit (HIV/STI Lab) while Dagwin is attached with the Infection and Immunity Unit.

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

## OUR LOCATIONS



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