



Health Minister & Secretary visit PNGIMR

"As IMR will celebrate its 50th anniversary next year we look forward to how we can improve the Institute to ensure we continue to support the outstanding work PNGIMR is doing."



By Alessandra Mel

Minister of Health, Sir Puka Temu and Secretary of Health Mr Pascoe Kase, visited the Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research (PNGIMR) and later visited the new Goroka Hospital wing on Friday 24th November 2017.

In welcoming the Minister and Secretary, Acting Director Dr William Pomat said, "It is an honour to have the Minister and Secretary here to visit and for staff to report on IMR's research achievements, challenges and solutions in order to save Papua New Guinean lives."

Appreciating the history Sir Puka Temu shared with PNGIMR; Dr Pomat expressed that, "As our Minister we look forward to implementing your vision of health for the next 5 years to improve primary health through continuing research in partnership with NDoH to improve health of Papua New Guineans."

Status reports of research conducted on pneumonia, enteric diseases, sexually transmitted infections, women's health, vector borne and health systems and translation

of these researches to policy were presented to the Minister and Secretary by scientific unit heads.

The Health Minister congratulated the staff and said, "I believe in this Institution and the research that has been done by IMR is impressive and I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all the former directors for their collective efforts to maintain the high standard of research by the Institute."

The Health Minister promised to organize a time for IMR researchers to present their reports to the other members of parliament in early 2018.

In support of the Institute's upcoming celebration, the Health Minister said, "As IMR will celebrate its 50th anniversary next year we will look forward to how we can improve the Institute to ensure we continue to support the outstanding work PNGIMR is doing."



Contents

- 2 Director's Message
- 3 PNGIMR welcomes new HR manager
- 4 Kauntim mi tu Port Moresby report launched
- 5 PNGIMR project updates
- 6 PNGIMR project updates
- 7 International scientific days
- 8 Training committee 2017 review
- 9 Passion for medical research - Dr Moses Laman
PNGIMR attends 1 week health expo in Goroka
- 10 Photos of staff in actions - fund-raising for 50th anniversary
- 11 Olgeta samting senis - Agnes Mek

Director's Message

Hello and welcome to the 54th issue of the IMR Nuis.

This newsletter brings you stories of the recent activities at PNGIMR.

The year is progressing well, despite the challenges we are heading in the right direction. As we move forward I would like to encourage everyone to think about three words – communication, motivation and responsibility. Communication is a vital aspect towards supporting motivation amongst our staff to promote ownership and responsibility while carrying out our duties.

2017 has provided some highlights. On behalf of staff and management I congratulate two of the Institute's staff who have received their PhDs - Dr Livingstone Tavul and Dr Janet Gare (the first national female). We thank our former Director Professor Peter Siba for believing in capacity building. This has opened the way for the PNGIMR staff to pursue further studies in health and medical research within PNG and abroad.

To our PNG National scientists who have completed their studies and for those who are still doing their studies. I encourage you all to strive for the best in your careers, and to be leaders in the field of medical and health research in Papua New Guinea (PNG).

We have a good management team in place that is ensuring the Institute functions normally. The Council is yet to appoint a permanent Director and the Deputy Director of CASS this is still being worked on. Now on behalf of management I would like to introduce the Institute's new HR manager, Mr Tobby Apa.

In the spirit of team work I would like to encourage the PNGIMR staff to stand together and work towards organizing a successful 50th Anniversary celebration for the Institute in August 2018. Since 1968 this Institute has been a pioneer in the field of health and medical research to improve the health status of Papua New Guineans.

As we work towards celebrating our 50th Anniversary let us look forward and ask ourselves what the PNGIMR can become 50 years from now. That dream starts today in all that we do together as staff of the PNGIMR.

William Pomat, Acting Director



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PNGIMR welcomes new HR manager



Mr Toby Apa, PNGIMR new HR Manager

The Institute recently welcomed Mr Toby Apa, the new Human Resource Manager in November 2017. Mr Apa had previously worked with PNGIMR HR division in 2010. During that time the office had done changes that positively impacted staff and their benefits to date.

Mr Apa expressed that: I am very pleased to still see the changes made when I was here in 2010 are still here in the HR office.

Based on his effective management skills with his attributes of work ethics Mr Apa has plans to bring necessary changes to the Institute. Under the leadership of Acting Director Dr William Pomat the HR manager keenly expressed his insight to improve staff performance.

"The Institute's staff should have exemplary punctuality towards time management (8 AM - 4:06 PM). "said Mr Apa. He also stated that being punctual should reflect in effective performance in ones work ethics.

He also stated changes that will occur under his management as HR manager for:

1. Staff performance appraisal system to be reviewed and implement a new version beginning 1st quarter of 2018.

2. To create a HR database system for easy access to staff information generation and reporting, also in the 1st quarter of 2018.

3. Review the current PNGIMR structure in consultation with the Salary Condition Monitoring Committee (SCMC) guidelines coordinated through the Department of Personnel Management (DPM) in the hope of increasing the currently staff ceiling and budget - 3rd quarter 2018.

4. HR/Payroll to migrate to using Attach'e Payroll software in the 2nd quarter of 2018 in the hope of addressing the current backload of payroll issues encountered in the Casper payroll system.

5. Seeking retrenchment/retirement funding through DPM, Treasury & Finance Departments anticipated for 3rd quarter 2018.

The motivation for improvement is key to ensure everyone can work harmoniously as staff of this reputable national institute. Mr Apa said, "I look forward to working in cooperation with all staff at PNGIMR."

Message to Staff for PNGIMR's 50th Anniversary: "Continue to give the best in your various duties to move the Insitute further in terms of medical research that is a concern for Papua New Guinea and the World."

'Kauntim mi tu' Port Moresby report launched

"HIV and STI rates in Papua New Guinea are among the highest in the world; however until now population-level estimates for these groups were unknown."

Researchers at Papua New Guinea's Institute of Medical Research (PNGIMR) have collaborated with Australian researchers from the Kirby Institute and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to provide the country's first representative survey of people most at risk for HIV in Port Moresby. The survey's results have been launched and released in Port Moresby on Thursday 25 January 2018 by Minister for Health and HIV, Hon Sir Puka Temu.

Clinical and behavioural information were collected from the populations considered most at risk for HIV and sexually transmissible infections (STIs) in Port Moresby; female sex workers, and men who have sex with men and transgender. The study found that in one in six sex workers in Port Moresby are HIV positive, and more than half of all sex workers have an STI other than HIV. Among men who have sex with men and transgender, almost one in 10 are HIV positive, and more than a third are positive for an STI.

The clinical component of the study involved testing each participant for sexually transmissible infections and blood-borne viruses at the point-of-care.

"Point-of-care means the collection and the testing is done in the clinic and the results are given to study participants within hours, eliminating the need to send specimens to a lab and return for results," says Dr Angela Kelly-Hanku from the Kirby Institute, principal investigator on the study. "If a participant returned a positive test for one of several STIs included in the study they were able to begin treatment immediately."



The results of this survey also give voice to the needs of highly marginalised groups in PNG society, who were central partners in the design and conduct of the study.

This is the first time a study of this kind has been able to test for so many STIs at point-of-care, and represents an important breakthrough in HIV and STI monitoring, testing and treatment in low resource settings.

Scientia Professor John Kaldor, head of the Public Health Interventions Group at the UNSW Medicine's Kirby Institute, believes that Australian researchers, with their in-country partners, are making important contributions to public health in PNG. "The HIV and STI epidemics in PNG are complex," says Scientia Professor Kaldor. "The findings from this study provide an improved roadmap for treatment, care and provision of other services to key populations affected by HIV and STIs in Port Moresby where this study was undertaken."

"The Australian Government has been a key funding partner for PNG's HIV response. Support for practical research that involves affected populations means that programs for prevention and treatment have a good chance of achieving their goals of reducing the high levels of HIV and other STIs."



"Collecting this kind of information is essential to inform Papua New Guinea's national strategy and provides vital information about where best to dedicate limited resources," says Dr Angela Kelly-Hanku, who holds a joint appointment with the Kirby Institute at UNSW Sydney, and the PNG Institute of Medical Research, and was recently awarded a prestigious UNSW Scientia Fellowship for her work in this area.

"The Kirby Institute and the PNG Institute of Medical Research have a long term and highly productive partnership that has enabled us to carry out complex and sensitive research projects among vulnerable populations in PNG. If we tried to do any of the work on our own, these challenges would be insurmountable," says Dr Kelly-Hanku.

Read the full report here: <https://kirby.unsw.edu.au/report/kauntim-mi-tu-port-moresby-2017>

Project updates.

Collaboration in research is effective in producing credible information and knowledge on issues in today's societies. Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research (PNGIMR) recognises and acknowledge collaboration to ensure quality research is done for the health and well-being of Papua New Guinea and its people.

Wantaim Project

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are a leading cause of morbidity, and in pregnancy can contribute, to maternal mortality and neonatal complications.

Maternal and neonatal mortality ratios in PNG, 594 per 100 000 and 25 per 1000 live births (est. 2013) respectively, are well above global averages. Studies have found that early, effective treatment of STIs in pregnancy reduces the risk of mother-to-child transmission (of STI infections) and adverse maternal and neonatal outcomes.

This is the onus of why the Wantaim trial, led by Professor Andrew Valelly and Dr. William Pomat, is so important. The trial itself will test pregnant women presenting at their first antenatal clinic visit for gonorrhoea, chlamydia, trichomonas and bacterial vaginosis, which is in addition to syphilis and HIV which are already tested at antenatal clinics.

As many women are lost to follow-up, the tests will be conducted at point-of-care (POC), using Gene-Xpert technology, and a positive result for any of the aforementioned STIs will lead to the pregnant women commencing treatment then and there.

There are numerous research avenues of the trial, one of which is the health economic and health systems. A small team comprised of Professor Virginia Wiseman, Dr. Neha Batura and Ms. Olga Saweri, will work to capture the efficiency and costing of the trial, which includes the upscale of the trial into nationwide implementation.

The reason why PNGIMR are testing for all of these STIs now is that we find quite a high prevalence of pregnant Papua New Guinean women with STIs but not only that it is not just one STI its multiple STIs.

UNSW Scientia scholarship

As luck would have it, the University of New South Wales (UNSW), home of the Kirby Institute, opened applications for the Scientia scholarship for PhDs and Post-doc positions.

Fortunately, Olga Saweri was awarded the scholarship to undertake her PhD at UNSW with the work she is currently conducting with the Wantaim trial. Under the guidance of Professor Virginia Wiseman, Professor Andrew Valelly and Professor John Kaldor, she will embark on a 4-year program in August, 2018, in Sydney.

Her PhD will look at a number of aspects of effectiveness within the scope of STI management in pregnancy. Primarily focusing on the economic cost effectiveness of STI management in pregnancy and birth outcomes.

Project Updates

VBDU Highlights

"Currently the Vector Borne Diseases Unit of PNGIMR has a number of studies ongoing. A major highlight in recent months has been its lymphatic filariasis (LF) program.

Following the findings of the LF safety study in Bogia and the initial efficacy studies in Maprik, 3 months ago the World Health Organisation changed its policy on alternative drugs that can be used in Mass Drug Administration campaigns globally to include a single dose of Ivermectin (to diethylcarbamazine and albendazole as pre-existing standard treatments).

This recommendation has resulted in a significant global impact when in January (last month) the drug company – Merck, expanded its donation program by increasing its Mectizan donation by an additional 10 million treatments to be provided free of charge annually through to 2025 for LF elimination efforts in endemic countries around the world. "

"The world is once again benefiting from the work of PNGIMR."

PNGIMR scientists at GCAI, Australia

"The nature of the smallholder production systems in PNG means that people have much closer daily contact with the animals than what we would see in an Australian setting."

Dr Andrew Peters - CSU lecturer

As part of a long-running collaboration, two scientists from the PNG Institute of Medical Research spent a month at the Graham Centre at Charles Sturt University (CSU) in Wagga Wagga.

Scientists from Papua New Guinea (PNG) are tapping into expertise at the Graham Centre for Agricultural Innovation to improve the health of smallholder farmers and their communities.

CSU lecturer in veterinary pathology Dr Andrew Peters said it's part of a project to understand more about the impact and risks of zoonotic diseases, such as Q Fever and leptospirosis.

"In recent years there has been a significant shift in the diets of urban people in PNG, moving from bush meat and pork, to poultry and beef. This has led to a growth in small-scale meat production in villages," Dr Peters said.

"We want to find out more about the incidence and risks of zoonotic disease, which is disease that can be transmitted from animals to humans. In particular, we want to understand more about the risks of Q Fever and leptospirosis."

Senior scientific officer in charge of the zoonotic and neglected diseases section at the PNG Institute of Medical Research, Sinafa Robby, and his colleague Debbie Kisa are working with scientists at CSU's Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory to learn diagnostic assays that will be of use to analyse samples back in PNG.

"Over the past seven years my work with Dr Peters and other researchers at Charles Sturt University has helped me to develop my skills in field sample collection and laboratory analysis," Robby said. "I've been able to share that knowledge with my colleagues building the capacity of the whole team."



Dr Peters said, "In a broader sense this collaboration aims to improve the diagnostic capacity for zoonotic disease by bringing together scientists in Australia and those working in the field in PNG.

"This relationship has a growing legacy that's building scientific capability in PNG by training veterinary practitioners, developing scientific knowledge and fostering lasting connections with Australian scientists."

Dr Peters and students from CSU's School of Animal and Veterinary Sciences will visit PNG in early 2018 to carry out fieldwork as part of the project.

International scientific celebrations

Since PNGIMR's establishment in 1968 it has pioneered in the field of medical scientific research in Papua New Guinea. In commemorating international medical scientific days the Institute reinforces that the work done here at PNGIMR contributes to an international platform of growing knowledge to better the health and wellbeing of people.

World Pneumonia Day 2017



Some IAI staff on World Pneumonia Day at PNGIMR

World Pneumonia Day is an annual event held on the 12th of November to unite people and organisations around the world in the fight against pneumonia: a very preventable and treatable illness, yet still remains a leading killer of children under the age of 5 years globally.

It was established by the formation of the Global Coalition against Child Pneumonia to: raise awareness about pneumonia; promote interventions to protect against, prevent and treat pneumonia; and generate action to combat pneumonia.

The first World Pneumonia Day was held in 2009.

After more than 40 years of pneumonia research conducted within our unit, we finally saw the introduction of a pneumonia vaccine, Pnevna13™, in PNG in 2014.

Celebration of World Pneumonia Day by our unit and staff is a way to recognise and mark the achievements and hard work we have made over the years in combating this illness. It also highlights the need to promote vaccine awareness, as well as the need to monitor the impact and effectiveness of the introduced vaccine in reducing pneumonia.

The Infectious and Immunity team celebrates World Pneumonia Day by organising cakes to take around to the hospital and clinics within Goroka as a thank you to all the staff and families who have helped in, participated in and contributed to our pneumonia studies.

World AIDS Day 2017

World AIDS Day takes place on the 1st December each year. It's an opportunity for people worldwide to unite in the fight against HIV, to show support for people living with HIV, and to commemorate those who have died from an AIDS-related illness.

Here are photos from World AIDS Day celebrated at PNGIMR



Staff during World AIDS Day at PNGIMR

Training committee 2017 overview

At the Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research (PNGIMR), developing and upgrading the skills of our national staff to enable them to take on more senior roles is paramount to sustaining the research programs in the long run.



The year 2017 was a mixed one for the training committee chaired by Mr George Koki and committee members : Dr Rebecca Ford, Dr Janet Gare, Dr Livingstone Tavul, Mr Denver Kave (former HR Manager), Mr Dickson Kuvi and Mr John Yogiyo.

Early in the year, the committee saw the departure of Mr Denver Kave who was an integral member of the training committee since 2011. HR is at the forefront of dealing with staff employment issues and the input from HR, aids the Training Committee in its approach to deal with staff development and training issues. Mrs Mary Amos replaced Denver as Training Committee member representing HR until the recent appointment of the new HR Manager Mr Tobby Apa .

On a sad note, Committee Member and Snr Training Officer Mr Dickson Kuvi has left PNGIMR. He has been with the institute for nine and a half years and has been the mainstay of the training office.

Dickson took over the management of the training office in 2010 and since then, had been heavily involved in coordinating the institute's staff development and training programs. The high number of IMR Post Graduate Students being enrolled and graduating at various universities is a testament to his contribution. We acknowledged his contribution and wish him well in his future career endeavours.

We continue to have regular meetings with strong representation and input from Madang branch which represented Wewak/Maprik and Alotau office as well.

Interest for Post Graduate Studies continues to increase and it is a challenge that we cannot support all Post Graduate training applications. The training committee has been tough on staff's internal short term training and Post Graduate Applications where all applications have to comply with the institute's training policy.

It is the institute's stance that a research staff who intends to undertake PhD & Masters studies, has to publish research papers as first author to be highly considered. This is not to be seen a deterrent but to encourage staff to publish their research work which also prepares them for studies. We continue to facilitate and coordinate our Honours/Post Graduate Diploma Program including Masters with UPNG.

We also continue to facilitate scholarship bidding opportunities for our staff however this year, we missed out on securing placing for the 2018 Australian Awards Scholarships. The committee has also managed to secure placing for one staff to undergo Short Term Training through the NZ Aid Program.

We are also grateful for our collaborative partners for also stepping in to support staff for skills based training, workshop and job attachment in country and overseas as well.

Major activity planned for next year is to undertake branch wide Training needs & assessment for both CASS and Scientific Staff with the aim to identify and focus on short term skills improvement training.

Application for 2019 Australian Awards Scholarship has already opened and will close on the 28th of February 2018.

To seek institutional support and endorsement, interested staff should apply to the training committee in the first instance by submitting an internal training application.

It is a condition that citizens who are currently employed under the Public Service and who intend to apply through the Open Category, their application will not be considered by the Australian Awards.

For more information contact the Training Office.



Passion for scientific research - Dr Moses Laman



Dr Laman (far right) with the 3 awardees at the Inaugural PNGAAA award ceremony 2017

Dr Moses Laman head of the Vector Borne Disease Unit (VBDU) at PNGIMR was awarded the Alumni of the year award at the Inaugural award ceremony on 9th November 2017.

This award is the first of its kind that was hosted by the Papua New Guinea Australian Alumni Association (PNGAAA) in Port Moresby.

It was formed to gather nationals who have been privileged to study in Australia through the scholarships provided by the Australian Government.

Dr Laman encouraged all staff who had benefited from an AusAid scholarship to nominate someone or apply themselves to be eligible to be chosen for one of the 4 categories.

The award categories are: young award, innovation and entrepreneurship award, Aust. High commission women in leadership award and alumni of the year award.

For more information on the categories go to: www.pngaaa.org.pg.

Since he began working with

PNGIMR, Dr Laman has found his passion towards the work here at the Institute motivates him to contribute to medical health research in the country.

“The kind of work IMR does especially the scientific side; it is difficult to find an organization like this in the country,” said Dr Laman.

The scientific process of research done at the PNGIMR ensures quality which reverts to the output effectively influencing health policies for the good of Papua New Guineans.

Despite the challenges of maintaining quality outputs, PNGIMR approaching its 50th year since its establishment has conducted groundbreaking research.

With a smile on his face, Dr Laman said, “PNGIMR is a part of us all we must continue to promote the Institute and the work we do here in order to ensure we contribute to saving the lives of Papua New Guineans.”

PNGIMR attends 1 week Health Expo in Goroka



The Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research (PNGIMR) was privileged to be a part of the South Pacific Division (SPD) of Seventh Day Adventist Church Health Expo. The expo was held from 23rd-27th October 2017 at the National Day Park in Goroka.

The health expo was conducted by the SPD and Dr Chester Kuma who headed it. It was facilitated by the PNG Union Mission and the local Eastern Highlands SDA Mission.

Booths were allocated for basic health checks during the day and evening seminars were held to give awareness of the increase of lifestyle diseases today. Dr Chris Ope from the Eastern Highlands

Provincial Hospital who coordinated the health expo invited PNGIMR to set up a booth at the expo.

The general public attended to have access to primary healthcare at the event. Information on health as well as health checks were done on site by the teams set up in different booths. PNGIMR staff gave awareness of the work the Institute carries out in Papua New Guinea (PNG) at the expo.

PNGIMR would like to thank Dr Ope and the organizing committee for inviting the Institute to be a part of the health expo and congratulations on the successful outcome of the event.



Photos of staff in action - fundraising for PNGIMR's 50th Anniversary

"The 50th Anniversary does not come around often in a life time. We should be proud to be involved and to see that the celebrations are successful. The event marks a time for us to reassess our priorities and plan for the future so that our research remain relevant to the health of Papua New Guineans."

Dr William Pomat - PNGIMR Acting Director



Olgeta samting senis - Agnes Mek

"LNG moni i pairap olsem wanpela bomb na kwik taim olgeta samting senis. The LNG money hit like a bomb and so quickly everything has changed."



"The main thing that people talked about was the influences of money, the need for money, the access to money or the lack of money."

Ms Agnes Mek is a social researcher with the Sexual & Reproductive Health Unit (SRHU) here at PNGIMR. Recently she successfully completed her Masters degree with the University of Goroka's Centre for Social and Creative Media (CSCM).

"My work was focused on the social impacts of how landowners were experiencing social change since the LNG project began," said Ms Mek.

As a social researcher it is essential in developing skills to apply innovative and creative methods when approaching issues affecting societies.

In her studies Ms Mek utilised the method of photovoice. This method allowed for participatory action between her as the researcher and the participants.

Photovoice is a qualitative method used for community-based participatory research to document and reflect reality. It is an empowering and flexible process that combines photography with grassroots social action.

"The main theme that came out was about the influence of money and how it has affected change since the

construction of the LNG project in Tari", said Ms Mek.

The in-depth insight Ms Mek undertook in her research provided a voice for the people and the issues they face.

Ms Mek would like to acknowledge Dr Angela Kelly and PNGIMR for assisting her to study, To Dr Verena Thomas with Centre for Social and Creative Media (CSCM) staff at UOG for their support in facilitating her study.

A challenge to everyone, men and women, you are never too old to learn. The sky is the limit, we all are capable only if we push ourselves to reach newer horizons.



OUR LOCATION



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Papua New Guinea Institute of
Medical Research

50th Anniversary

1968 - 2018

