

## National Oncology Centre for Cancer Treatment Needed



*Acting Chief Executive Officer of WHPHA, Mr David Vorst welcoming the participants*

The absence of a specialist cancer treatment centre in the country equipped with proper tools, equipment and manpower to treat cancer patients is a major concern for the Health Department.

And senior health officials are now holding regional cancer outreach meetings with doctors and health administrators from each region in a bid to gather as much information as possible to put together a national cancer program to

address this issue.

During its Highlands Regional Outreach meeting in Mt Hagen recently, doctors expressed concern that the absence of proper cancer screening tools and equipment, delays in histopathology diagnosis (can only be done in PMGH), lack of consistent and reliable supplies of chemotherapeutic drugs and absence of proper radiotherapy facilities were resulting in large numbers of unnecessary deaths from cancer.



*The participants in deep discussion on the cancer issue*

This coupled with lack of awareness and late presentation by patients were contributing to this huge problem, they added.

The doctors said the National Department of Health (NDoH) wanted to establish oncology centres in major hospitals such as Mt Hagen, Goroka and Angau but a lot of work was needed to improve the facilities, train all levels of staff and ensure the

appropriate equipment was in place.

They said the Health Department and its development partners together with the National Government needed to work together to address this issue.

The doctors suggested that one way to address this issue was for the Government to fund and establish a fully-equipped and staffed national state-of-the-art oncology centre to treat patients from all provinces.

The regional outreach meetings are held to gather as much information as possible on services provided so that an accurate and up-to-date report on cancer could be prepared for the Health Secretary to present to the Health Minister for action by the Government.

A number of presentations were made at the Mt Hagen meeting, mostly by doctors from Mt Hagen Hospital which the meeting said were useful and informative and would be included in a final report with recommendations for all stakeholders to see and action.

The acting Chief Executive Officer of the Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority (WHPHA), Mr David Vorst in welcoming the delegates said a national cancer treatment centre was fundamental to the growth of the nation.

He said the regional cancer meetings were held at a time when the WHPHA was currently negotiating with private enterprise, supported by NDoH to buy equipment and set up an oncology service under its redevelopment program and he welcomed the initiative taken.

Mr Vorst said Mt Hagen being the referral hospital for the Highlands region was a busy hospital serving nearly half the population of PNG and the quality of care provided was as good as anywhere in the country.

He said this year the WHPHA had spent in excess of K1.6 million to purchase drugs which the Health Department could not supply and it was hoped that under the redevelopment program, a regional drug procurement unit would be set up to have a good supply of drugs for the region

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# Mothers and babies die due to unsupervised deliveries

**M**others and babies in the country die each year because pregnant mothers do not visit health facilities to receive professional care and have supervised deliveries.

A graduation of Community Health Workers (CHWs) in Mt Hagen last week was told that of all the babies born in the country only 60% had supervised deliveries and that it is far more likely (around 50%) of non-supervised deliveries to result in infant death.

The graduation of the CHWs who had undergone upskilling training in Emergency Maternal and Newborn Care was told that a baby had 60 seconds after birth to live if resuscitation was required. Mothers were also at risk of excessive bleeding, therefore, high level skills were required in supervising deliveries.

Professor Glen Mola, the Head of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the University of PNG's School of Medicine and Health Sciences said when officiating at the ceremony, "We are upskilling CHWs with the necessary knowledge and skills to help mothers and babies, but how can you help them when they do not come to the health facilities or antenatal clinics for routine check-ups".

Prof Mola said information reaching mothers through word of mouth about some mothers being saved in health facilities was a good way of encouraging others to do the same and be saved from life-threatening situations. It is absolutely essential that the CHWs also make a strong effort to attract pregnant women to their Health Centres.

He added that family planning was another issue where mothers need to get more professional advice. The most important issue is to have contraceptives to avoid unwanted pregnancies and he was concerned some women once pregnant do things which are not safe for themselves or their unborn babies.

"Some women are still giving birth at 40 years



*The graduates proudly displaying their certificates with Prof Glen Mola standing in the back centre*

and above and some are having babies every year and this is dangerous for their health and that of their children. Many of these women are well educated and they must change their attitudes", he said.

Prof Mola suggested they must space their children and have them every three years or more so that they could grow up to be strong and healthy children.

The six-month CHW upskilling training course was the sixth to be conducted by the Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority (WHPHA) since the first one in midwifery was conducted in 2012. More than 57 CHWs from health facilities

in Western Highlands, Enga and Jiwaka provinces have completed this training.

This year's training which was funded by UNICEF with support from the WHPHA saw eight participants from both government and church-run health facilities in Western Highlands graduate.

The upskilling training program has brought great benefits to the respective health facilities and communities where the CHWs worked in but the real benefit must be seen - an increase in supervised deliveries. This is a challenge for the CHWs and community at large to encourage attendance at a health facility when giving birth.

## Mt Hagen doctors do well in exams

**D**octors from Mt Hagen Hospital pursuing their Masters programs have done well in part 1 of their MMed (Masters in Medicine) examination in the last three years.

Out of 40 - 50 registrars who sit for the common core exam each year, Mt Hagen Hospital doctors have been among the highest scorers since 2016, ranking first and third in 2016, first and fourth in 2017 and second this year.

This year's highest scorer in the common core which includes basic science units such as molecular biology, physiology, pharmacology and pathology was Mt Hagen Hospital Registrar, Dr Stanley Malen who ranked second in a field of 33 candidates.

He was also one of three doctors to score High Distinction.

The common core exam which is undertaken by candidates from all specialties is traditionally difficult for candidates from the provinces to pass, according to a former lecturer, because all the basic science lecturers are based at the Taurama Medical Faculty of the University of PNG.

However, Mt Hagen Hospital doctors have done well because they work for an organisation that has one of the most up-to-date Information

Technology (IT) systems which has helped them to access learning materials.

In the absence of lecturers, the doctors have been able to access the

internet and download lectures and tutorials to study and this has prepared them well for their exams.

In addition, the doctors are also privileged to have some of the best Specialist Medical Officers in the respective departments as well as an experienced former lecturer of the UPNG Medical School who constantly mentor the young registrars which has helped them to do well.

Dr Malen who is the only registrar in internal medicine at Mt Hagen Hospital will now prepare himself for part 2 of the four-year MMed program.

Doctors who did well in the previous two years were James Tony (first) and Rebecca Kai (third) in 2016 and Dr Lucas Kondi (first) and Dr John Gabriel (fourth) in 2017.

Dr Malen is from Kandep in Enga Province but was born and raised in Kainantu, Eastern Highlands where his father was adopted and raised by a local.

He attended primary and secondary schools in Kainantu before enrolling at the Medical Faculty in 2009 and graduating in early 2014.

He completed his two years of residency at the



*Registrar in Internal Medicine, Dr Stanley Malen*

Port Moresby General Hospital before accepting an offer to work at Mt Hagen Hospital in March 2016.

The management and staff of the Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority join hands in congratulating Dr Malen and the other four doctors for successfully completing part 1 of their MMed program and wish them success in the rest of the exams.



# UNICEF Funds Training of Village Birth Attendants

Women from the Tambul/Nebilyer District of Western Highlands are now equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to help pregnant mothers deliver safely in their respective areas.

This follows their attendance of a month-long training course for village birth attendants at the Mt Hagen Hospital campus of the Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority recently.

The course which involves both theory and practical sessions has been funded by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) as part of its ongoing efforts to help reduce child mortality in the country.

UNICEF has provided funding for transport and accommodation costs for 20 participants from villages in the Kiripia and Alkena areas of Lower Kagul and Tambul in Upper Kagul to undertake the training.

The women, mostly middle-aged mothers have been trained on how to help expectant mothers when they go into labour and later take them to the nearest health centre or hospital to deliver.

They have also been issued with emergency delivery kits to assist expectant mothers if they are unable to attend a health facility because of access or time constraints.

Two more training courses would be conducted for mothers from the same district in the next few months before it is rolled out to other districts of Western Highlands.

The training will be provided by staff from WHPHA and accommodation for the participants is being provided on the Mt Hagen Hospital campus which is also where the participants will receive their practical training.

The mothers spent two weeks acquiring hands-on experience in the labour ward, postnatal, antenatal and maternal and child health clinics of Mt Hagen Hospital before they were issued with certificates of recognition as qualified village birth attendants during their graduation.

UNICEF representative, Dr Manish Namdeo said his organisation was pleased to have assisted the training program with technical and financial support, resulting in the success of the first phase.

He said UNICEF would continue to support this initiative and other similar programs in future which would go towards reducing child mortality in the country.



Top right - The participants displaying their certificates with Dr Manish Namdeo (left). Middle and bottom - the VBAs in a group photo and in a theory session and above - a congratulatory cake for the participants to enjoy before departing for home.



# Tininga Group puts smiles on little sick faces at Xmas



Despite their health conditions, there were plenty of smiles on the faces of sick children at Mt Hagen Hospital when Santa Claus visited them during Christmas.

Those who were admitted at the Children's Ward as well as those that sought treatment at the Children's Out-patient Department on Christmas Eve were treated to plenty of lollies and presents by Father Christmas, adding smiles to their sick faces and brightening up their day.

As usual, it was the Tininga Group of Companies of Mt Hagen that sponsored Father Christmas to do the rounds and distribute the lollies and presents, making the sick children happy and smiling during the festive season.

Accompanied by the company owners, Pat and Margie Duckworth and some of their employees, there was plenty for the children to chew and play with or wear what was given to them.

Father Christmas and Pat and Margie also made time available to chat with the sick children and their parents in the ward and wished them well.

The children in the COPD were not as seriously ill as those in the ward and this was evident when they rushed to Father Christmas and called after him for more lollies and presents.

Father Christmas was visibly exhausted and sweating while trying to fulfil the wishes of the children but at the end of the day, it was a worthwhile visit and everyone was happy.

**Below - Owners of Tininga Group of Companies, Pat and Margie Duckworth chatting with a child and its mother and friends.**



**Top left, top and above - Father Christmas doing his rounds at the Children's Ward and the Children's Out-patient Department, distributing lollies and presents and top centre and left, Pat Duckworth chats with two children and their mothers at the Children's Ward.**