

# THE INFORMER

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A MOTHER AND CHILD IS THE REASON WE EXIST

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WHPHA

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## INTERPLAST TEAM CONDUCTS LIFE-CHANGING SURGERIES

A team of volunteer doctors and nurses from Interplast Australia & New Zealand arrived in Mt Hagen in late January to carry out plastic surgery on patients with external body disabilities.

The team comprising two plastic surgeons, two anaesthetists and two registered nurses arrived on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> January and started reviewing patients at Mt Hagen Hospital the next day before conducting surgery on selected patients.

The team led by plastic surgeon, Dr Mark Strahan met with his own return airfares to Mt Hagen to provide free surgical intervention programs to relieve people of disabilities such as cleft lip and palate, burns, tumours, hand injuries and contractures.

Interplast is a volunteer organization based in Melbourne, Australia, whose members provide free medical treatment to people living with a disability as a result of a congenital or an acquired condition including children suffering from burns.

Dr Strahan said his team was looking mainly at deformities such as cleft lip and palate to correct because they were awful and an hindrance to a happy life.

He said the team examined about 80 patients during the review and operated on 12 of them on the first day of surgery and all were recovering well.

He added that similar numbers were expected to be operated on during the remaining days of their two-week visit to try and help as many patients as possible.

Dr Strahan said some cases which needed specialist surgery would be referred to Port Moresby General Hospital to be operated on.

He said the theatre and equipment including the anaesthetic machine were good and the team was honoured to work alongside an enthusiastic team of national doctors, nurses and anaesthetists who were willing and ready to help those in need.



"We have trained them in our techniques and we have also learnt from them which has helped us to carry out successful surgeries", he said.

The team has also thanked the management of the hospital and the Medical Board of PNG for allowing it to come and do this job which it has been doing since the year 2000.

The volunteer clinicians left Mt Hagen on 7<sup>th</sup> February after conducting surgery on 30 patients, mostly children. The patients have all praised and thanked the visitors as well as the local clinicians for doing a great job on their deformed bodies and giving them a new lease of life.

*Pictured above - The visiting clinicians pose for a picture with their local counterparts after the completion of the surgeries and right, a child recovering from surgery with her mother in the recovery ward. Below, Dr Mark Strahan (centre) and two clinicians examine a child after surgery in the recovery ward.*



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## CHILDREN UNDER FIVE YEARS TO BE IMMUNISED AGAINST MEASLES

All children under the age of five in Western Highlands Province will be immunised against measles in light of the recent discovery of the disease in New Ireland and Gulf Provinces and the National Capital District.

The Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority (WHPHA) is taking this proactive measure in a bid to protect these children from contracting the disease despite receiving no official directive from the National Department of Health to do so.

WHPHA's Director of Population Health, Benson Safi said the Authority would carry out routine immunisation to cover every scheduled vaccination, taking note of low coverage areas that had been identified during the 2019 vaccination campaign.

In June last year the Authority carried out a province-wide immunisation campaign against measles-rubella as part of a nation-wide campaign but only covered 93.5 percent of the catchment population due to certain factors including tribal fighting and logistical issues.

Mr Safi said because of the low coverage, efforts would now be made to assess all risk areas and make efforts to reach them as well as to accelerate routine vaccination so that

coverage is increased to at least more than 95 percent.

He said apart from the health facilities, vaccination booths would also be set up in central places around the province to ensure all children are immunised. This would help to keep a record of all children and their immunisation history.

The WHPHA will also introduce an incentive program aimed at encouraging parents to take their children to the nearest health facility for vaccination.

The proposed incentive will involve the participation of major Mt Hagen-based retailer, Tininga Group of Companies as part of its contribution towards helping the WHPHA meet the health needs of the local community and the surrounding provinces.

Under the incentive, a K15 voucher is proposed to be issued to a parent who presents a child with a Child Health Book to a health facility at the appropriate time for the child to be immunised. It is envisaged that the voucher would be issued for redemption at any one of the Tininga Group of companies' stores.

Chief Executive Officer of WHPHA, David Vorst, said an incentive program represented a substantial investment and a sufficient return on investment required the full participation of the program participants both providers and consumers.

He said programs should offer participants the right products and or services based on their unique interests and diverse needs and WHPHA believes it has developed the rewards carefully to keep participants eager to approach a new goal once they have achieved a reward.

"Our efforts to immunise all children under the age of five years against major diseases such

measles is expected to achieve positive results with up to 99 percent of the catchment population immunised as we expect the low-income families in villages to grab the opportunity in numbers to benefit from the incentive", Mr Vorst concluded.

The aim of the incentive is to enhance change in the behaviour of parents to feel responsible for the health of their children and take them to clinics for compulsory immunisation.

*These photos show activities that took place during a province-wide immunisation campaign in June 2019.*



## Tininga to purchase GeneXpert machine for Mt Hagen Hospital

Mt Hagen-based Tininga Group of Companies has again offered to assist the Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority (WHPHA) with its health needs.

The company has this time agreed to purchase a GeneXpert machine for use in the Pathology Laboratory of Mt Hagen Hospital to do tests for diseases such as tuberculosis (TB), cancer and HIV.

Mt Hagen Hospital currently has an IV- Module GeneXpert that is used to do TB diagnosis and the new machine would be used to compliment this service as well as to do tests for other diseases such as cervical cancer and HIV.

The GeneXpert test is a molecular test for TB. The GeneXpert diagnoses TB by detecting the presence of TB bacteria, as well as testing for resistance to the drug Rifampicin.

Cervical cancer, TB and HIV/AIDS are major concerns for the WHPHA as these are diseases that claim many lives not only in the Western Highlands but other provinces as well and Tininga are also concerned.

As such the company has offered to buy the GeneXpert machine at a cost of more than

K200,000 to help Mt Hagen Hospital conduct diagnostic tests on patients suspected of having these diseases so that they could be detected early and treated to save their lives.

The offer to purchase this machine comes only three months after a total of 14 clinicians and laboratory technicians from the hospital as well as churches and NGOs had undergone five days of intensive training on the use of this machine, particularly on HIV Viral load testing.

The clinicians were trained on how to collect quality samples for HIV Viral load testing while the laboratory staff were shown how to perform HIV Viral load testing using GeneXpert.

The training was conducted by four officers from the Central Public Health Laboratory (CPHL) of the National Department of Health following an assessment of the pathology laboratory in October last year where it had fulfilled the NDoH/CPHL criteria and was recommended to do HIV Viral load testing using GeneXpert.

The Managing Director of Tininga, Pat Duckworth said his company was pleased to help Mt Hagen Hospital with this machine because it was a regional

referral hospital whose services benefited not only the people of Western Highlands but other neighbouring provinces as well.

He said when his company made a decision to assist someone, it looked at organisations such as the hospital and WHPHA because there was good leadership and more people benefited from their services.

"We are Hagen-based and when we want to help, we look at an organisation where all the people of Western Highlands will benefit from and not just one group only.

"We look at good leadership and strong governance and we see that Mt Hagen Hospital and WHPHA have that so we assist them to assist not only the people of Western Highlands but other provinces as well who seek their services," Mr Duckworth said.

Chief Executive Officer of WHPHA, David Vorst said Tininga had helped Mt Hagen Hospital and WHPHA on many occasions and their kind gesture had helped many sick people for which he was happy for and thanked the company for its great generosity.

# WHPHA receives much needed financial assistance

The Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority (WHPHA) will now be able to purchase essential drugs for patients which the Area Medical Store cannot supply.

It will also purchase new urology equipment, build a shed for an incinerator and diesel to allow its fleet to stay on the road, all, thanks to the Sir Brian Bell Foundation.

The Foundation has provided funds to meet these costs largely supporting the Regional Hospital as well as purchasing a new generator set for the Bukapena Health Centre at a total cost of more than K235,000.

The commitment is part of the Foundation's ongoing support for health and education in the country and it follows a brief meeting held in Mt Hagen recently between the WHPHA CEO, David Vorst, his A/Director of Clinical Network and Mt Hagen Hospital Manager, Jane Holden and Foundation Director, Ian Clough.

The executives discussed among other issues, the financial difficulties experienced by Mt Hagen Hospital and other facilities in light of the current financial constraints faced by the country and the lack of funding for the operations of the WHPHA.

Whilst there remain other challenges, the areas funded needed immediate attention.

Acting Chief Executive Officer for the WHPHA, Jane Holden said she was very grateful for the financial assistance as it helps solve some of the urgent financial needs of the hospital and the rural facilities.

She said the Foundation has a history of



**Pictured above is the old incinerator shed that will be pulled down and replaced with a new one**

supporting the WHPHA when in August 2017 it donated 39 cartons of drapes, gowns, bedsheets and drawsheets, as well as supporting attendance at professional meetings twice - and she was very happy for the commitment which she said had been made at a time when the Authority needed it most.

Ms Holden said this donation was unexpected and thanked the Foundation's Chief Executive Officer, Ms Bronwyn Wright and Director Ian Clough for their generosity which allowed the WHPHA to continue to provide essential services to the thousands of patients who sought its support every week.

## WHPHA WITHDRAWS VEHICLES AND CLOSES FACILITIES IN DEI DISTRICT



"We understand that getting to Mt Hagen is an expensive exercise for many and some may not be able to get there, however, we have tried to work with the leaders of the District seeking assistance to ensure our staff and vehicle safety but this has not been successful", she said.

"We remain committed to providing services to Dei District but unless the immediate threats are dealt with we have no choice but to protect the lives of our staff. As soon as these threats are removed we will reinstate full services".

Mt Hagen Hospital has recently provided acute services to those who are injured in the fights and remains impartial in that commitment however, this aspect is also now under consideration by clinical staff.

**Pictured left - Three of the vehicles withdrawn from Kotna, Tigi and Miti Ku Health Centres parked at the WHPHA Headquarters and below, the Kenembo Health Centre ambulance that was stolen and stripped of many of its parts.**



The Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority (WHPHA) has closed health facilities in the Dei District and withdrawn all its vehicles due to continuous tribal fighting in the district.

The fight between the two warring clans has gone on for far too long and the safety of the staff can no longer be guaranteed.

"It is with deep sadness that the Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority has decided to withdraw all vehicles from Dei District and closing the health facilities in the District.

"We have taken this huge step because we can

no longer ensure the safety of our staff, vehicles or facilities in the Dei District", said Jane Holden, Acting CEO for WHPHA.

This follows the hijacking of two vehicles, one stolen and stripped down as well as the abduction of a driver and threats to other staff by those involved in the ongoing tribal fight.

A number of staff have sought transfer to Mt Hagen Hospital as they fear for their own safety.

"From a health perspective what is more distressing is that services required by women and children including birthing and vaccinations will not be accessible.

# Tininga Group employees undergo medical checks



Employees over the age of 35 of the Tininga Group of Companies in Mt Hagen now know if they are healthy or not after going through a thorough medical check-up recently.

The company had arranged for them to be checked to ensure that if there was any medical issue discovered through the medical screening process they could seek appropriate medical treatment.

Tininga is a good corporate citizen which values its employees and wanted to give the staff the opportunity which may not have been available to them otherwise.

It had requested the Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority (WHPHA) to make

available a medical team to carry out the checks to ensure the employees were all fit and healthy.

The company had requested that older employees be checked first, starting with those from 35 years and above and later the rest of the 800-plus employees.

The WHPHA's Director for Population Health, Benson Safi and his Deputy Director for health promotion, Fredah Pyanyo led a team of clinicians to the company premises on 27th January and conducted the medical checks free of charge.

The team first visited the company's Hagen Central shopping centre and then the Best Buy supermarket before moving to the Dobel shopping centre along the Highlands Highway where the examinations ended with a total of over 300 employees being checked.

The employees had their personal details checked first such as their height and weight before they had their blood pressure, vision and cholesterol level checked. Those that had medical issues were either treated on the spot or referred to Mt Hagen Hospital for further tests and treatment.

During the screening, the clinicians also advised the employees of the dangers of lifestyle diseases and what they could do to avoid becoming sick. They urged them to eat plenty of vegetables and less fatty foods which cause high blood pressure, diabetes and heart failure.

They also told the employees to be the agents of change in their respective communities by extending the same message to their people so that everyone could live a healthy life.

The management of Tininga has thanked the WHPHA for accepting their request to conduct the medical checks and added that the good working relationship between the two organisations would continue for the benefit of everyone in the province.

As a good corporate citizen, Tininga has in the past assisted paediatric patients to travel to Port Moresby for open heart surgery and has also contributed towards the cost of setting up the Well Women's Clinic at Mt Hagen Hospital.

Chief Executive Officer of the WHPHA, David Vorst said Tininga was clearly a good employer with the health and welfare of their staff a high priority.



*These pictures show clinicians from the WHPHA conducting checks on the staff for various medical conditions including blood pressure and eyesight.*

