

Editorials

PHD Matters!

Welcome to the fifth issue of PHD and a special thanks goes to Rex Hunton, the issue editor, for bringing it all together.

Non-communicable disease (NCD) is undoubtedly a Pacific epidemic to be reckoned with. The papers on obesity, diabetes, hypertension, smoking, periodontal diseases, animal stings, scurvy, neuroblastoma, caries, fractured mandibles, and motor vehicle abuse demonstrate the diversity and depth hidden behind the NCD label. The extensive magnitude and complexity of NCD suggests that we must target the risk areas of maximum overlap shared by many NCD in order to efficiently tackle these problems. These will be teased out in future PHD issues.

To combat NCD we should also re-examine what we take for granted. For example, many suggestions on stopping smoking focus on consumers without any suggestion of controlling the supply of tobacco through legislation or control of imports. Both the suppliers and consumers of NCD risk factors – such as tobacco, alcohol, drugs and fatty foods – must be equally vigilant in their effort to brake this NCD epidemic. They must bear equal responsibility for stringent export and import restrictions and the cost of medical care for their results expressed as NCD.

This PHD issue has a wealth of consumer focussed ideas to address NCD in the Pacific. From the 'Guest Editorial' onwards, the notion of lifestyle disease and personal responsibility for NCD risk dominates. However, if we step back, it is also true that the lifestyle we have is also moulded by the physical and social climate in which we develop. Werner, Alto and their review of 'Pacific Island Social and Human Development' introduce us to issues such as the national focus on development for wealth rather than health and the maldistribution of educational opportunities.

I thank the readers for their positive comments on PHD but, as the Editor, I also want to hear from you if you disagree with what we are saying so we can create a balanced dialogue in this Pacific vehicle for health. We need all contributions if PHD is to be a medium for Pacific dialogue.

The September 1996 issue has a theme of 'Environmental Health and Infectious Diseases' and, as usual, will be treated from a variety of viewpoints. Your contribution to any of the PHD sections will be appreciated and peer reviewed with respect.

Help us make PHD matters relevant and timely for Pacific health and, more importantly, useful to your work and communities. Try PHD today!

Sitaleki Finau
Editor

NCD comes home

Non-communicable diseases are a poorly defined group of conditions. What is clear is the significant morbidity and mortality transition occurring in both developing and developed countries. This is underpinned by important socio-cultural factors often manifest as lifestyle changes.

Health professionals need to recognise this transition so that they can change their practices from the biomedical model which emphasises cure to a model which advocates patient participation, long term environmental modification and behavioural changes. Some medical schools including the PBMOTP and the Fiji School of Medicine are addressing this need for change in their problem-based learning curricula which include integration of public health with clinical training.

Articles about traffic accidents, tobacco smoking, obesity, diet, diabetes and other lifestyle morbidity transitions in the Pacific countries are prominent in this issue. This is encouraging as a solid database must be the foundation required to combat this growing epidemic of NCD.

One incongruity is that while publishing this issue of PHD on combating the diseases of lifestyle and environment changes, on 29th of January this year France detonated its sixth nuclear bomb at Mururoa atoll! The islands of the Pacific have already paid too much for the nuclear development of the superpowers. It is now time for united and stronger Pacific health policies which prevent such invasions of the environment.

Rex Hunton
Associate editor