

# Fiji National Health Systems Research Workshop Report

Shareen Swastika Ali

## Abstract

*The National Health Systems Research Workshop which was organized in conjunction with the World Health Organization, Ministry of Health Fiji and the Fiji School of Medicine was history in its making, the very first for the nation. It was based on the six building blocks as defined in the Framework of Action for WHO; (i) good health services, (ii) a well performing health workforce, (iii) a well – functioning health information system, (iv) access to essential medical products, vaccines and technologies, (v) a good health financing system and (vi) leadership and governance. A total of 27 papers were presented over the two day program with hundred attendees. SWOT analysis for the workshop was done. Participants were given the opportunity to critically appraise local research papers and hoped that this became a regular event. PHD, 2009; (15) (2); pp. 7-12*

## Introduction

The health research systems is a method for planning, coordinating, monitoring and managing health research resources and activities; and for promoting research for effective and equitable national health development. A concept that integrates and coordinates the objectives, structures, stakeholders, processes, cultures and outcomes of health research towards the development of equity in health and in the national health system.(1)

Strengthening of health systems is one of the key items on the agenda for World Health Organization (WHO). Over the years, we have progressed immensely in terms of technology, curing diseases and prolonging life, however we cannot ignore the fact that the vulnerable population of the world such as people from middle – low income generating countries, the indigenous people, people suffering from HIV/AIDS, people from South Pacific Island nations who are more prone to the effects of global warming and women and children are still not at the receiving end of these benefits. Year 2015 that is given so much prominence for the conclusion of the Millennium Development Goals is round the corner and we are already seeing indications that reaching these set targets may not eventuate after all.

Therefore, WHO has come up with a Framework for Action which defines a discrete number of building blocks which makes up a health system – (i) good health services, (ii) a well performing health workforce, (iii) a well – functioning health information system, (iv) access to essential medical products, vaccines and technologies, (v) a good health financing system and (vi) leadership and governance.

This workshop was funded by the WHO together with the Ministry of Health Fiji (MoH) and the Fiji School of Medicine (FSMed) under the biennium budget to address all the areas of health systems building blocks in order to achieve improved health, health equity in ways that are responsive, financially fair, greater access to and coverage for effective health interventions without compromising efforts to ensure provider quality and safety and make the best or most efficient use of available resources. (2)



## Rationale

The paper on *Fijian Participation in Health Research* revealed that the driving force of health research in the Pacific has seen expatriates from developed countries come and do research, without much involvement by locals, take the data off shore to analyze and publish elsewhere, without benefiting the researched communities. For the period July 1965 – April 2002 analysis of 298 Medline publications showed that >80% of the papers had expatriate authorship and only <20% were undertaken by Fiji researchers.(3)

This is further reinforced by a quick review of the applications received by the Fiji National Research Ethics Review Committee in 2008. 35 proposals were received of which 14 (40%) were from local investigators. The reasons for locals to do research were; 7 (50%) were to fulfill academic requirements, 5 (35.7%) as per work requirements and only 2 (14.3%) were out of self interest to better health practice. (4) In addition, over the years, our staff has been attending numerous training programs on epidemiology, research proposal writing and biostatistics but we have hardly seen any publications.

On the other hand, we thought that there was a possibility that people may have been writing but there was never a platform given to them to present or publish such papers. Based on these findings, we conceptualized the idea of hosting a National Health Systems Research Workshop.

## Organization

Work for organizing the two - day workshop began mid of last year. The Health Research Unit of MoH was delegated the responsibility to organize this workshop. Two days were feasible for us due to budgetary limitations and we could not release clinical staff for any longer period than this. "Call for Abstracts" were sent in December 2008 with the deadline for March 2009 and receipt of final papers by May 2009. We thought this will give enough time for potential local researchers to come up with a paper. To encourage submission we gave incentives which were to nominate five best papers for publication in the Pacific Health Dialog or the Fiji Medical Journal and one local investigator to attend an international conference in Australia or New Zealand and present the selected paper in an international arena.

There were no criteria for submission for papers and no registration fee for attendees as we wanted the workshop to be "local researcher friendly" as possible. An independent committee was nominated to decide on the recipients of the incentives.

We considered the possibility that we might not receive enough papers to host the program, therefore invited guest speakers. However, we were happily surprised to receive an overwhelming response of 30 papers.



## The Workshop

All submissions were accepted but only 27 papers were presented due to last minute cancellations.

Subject	No. of Papers
Oral Health	3
Nutrition	3
Surgery	2
Primary Health Care	1
Health Financing	1
Pediatrics	5
Human Resource	2
Health Information	4
Nursing	1
Health Policy	1
General	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>

*Table 1: Number of Papers Received According to Different Subject Areas*

The program was divided into plenary sessions in the morning where guest speakers presented their papers. In the midday session, the forum was divided into thematic groups which were color coded. Participants had the opportunity to select the group of their interest and critically appraise their colleagues work through round table discussions. In the afternoon, summary presentations from each group were done followed by paper presentations from guests. Different Chairs were assigned for each of the sessions.

### GROUP 1

1. Implementing Fiji’s Health Management Reforms (1999 – 2004) – A. Aumua
2. Staffing the Fiji Health System. R. Sutton, G. Roberts & D. Lingam.
3. Health Financing in Fiji – Lingam D and Roberts G.

### GROUP 2

1. Rapid Echocardiographic Screening for Rheumatic Heart Disease in Fiji- Reeves B. Brook M.
2. Prospective Surveillance of Streptococcal Sore Throat in a Tropical Country. Steer A., Jenny A, Kado J., Good M., Batzloff M., Magor G., E. Roslyn, Mulholland K., Carapetis J.

### GROUP 3

1. Changes in Food Eating Pattern in Fiji – Schultz J.
2. Assessing Community Readiness for Obesity Prevention in Youths in the OPIC Project in Fiji – An Application of the Community Readiness Model – Waqa G., Roberts G.
3. Micronutrient Status of Women in Fiji – Vatucawaqa P.

Almost 100 participants from WHO, FSMed, AUSAID, Fiji Health Sector Improvement Project (FHSIP), MoH,



University of Queensland, Fiji Rheumatic Heart Disease (RHD) Program and Fiji Pneumococcal Project (FIPP) attended the workshop.



*Picture 1: Vicki Bennett from Health Information Systems Knowledge Hub, University of Queensland, presenting paper on Patient Information Systems in Fiji.*

### **SWOT Analysis:**

Evaluation forms comprising of 10 questions in relation to the concept, program, venue, catering and accommodation were given to the attendees. 80 completed forms were received which was analyzed using the Epi Info 2008 software. Based on the responses SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats) analysis was done.



*Picture 2: Participants at the Health Systems Research Workshop held at Fiji School of Medicine from 25th -26th June, 2009.*



- **Strengths:** The workshop was organized in such a way to provide an enabling and supportive environment to present research papers from the investigators perspective and identify areas for future research from the audience's perspective. It aroused interest and gave a chance to critically appraise current practices so that the findings can be transferred to appropriate areas of action within the health settings.
- **Weakness:** Since the submission for papers were not categorized there was a bias for public health issues rather than clinical topics. Similar findings were demonstrated in the analysis done to identify the themes currently being pursued in the research portfolio and agendas within developing countries, which suggested more attention, was given to community levels.(5) Time deadlines given to each speaker was not strictly followed resulting in lengthy presentations.
- **Opportunities:** The Health Research Unit displayed IEC (Information, Education and Communication) materials to a wider crowd demonstrating its functions within the MoH. It was an eye – opener to the staff to know that the Unit provided funding and technical assistance in health research related areas, prospects that were hardly utilized by them. Networks with colleagues from Fiji and abroad were formed. Gaps in the Fijian Health Systems were identified and strategies were suggested to address this.
- **Threats:** Due to the mass retirement of many civil servants in the health sector, and sharing of their workload among the remaining staff, there might be time constraints to write research papers. Moreover there is lack of incentives in terms of salary increments or promotions for evidence based practice in the system.

### Recommendations

The following suggestions have been put forward:

1. Guidelines and general themes to be given to interested presenters so that all areas are covered adequately.
2. All details of the workshop to be posted on the MoH Fiji website for wider dissemination of information.
3. Submissions from health professionals in the private sector to be invited in any future workshops.
4. Soft copy of all the materials of the workshop to be given to all participants who do not have access to the internet
5. Power Point templates to be given to presenters to encourage consistency and for effective time management.
6. Many small incentives to be given to a large number of presenters rather than only one investigator getting a huge prize.

Generally the workshop was enjoyed by all who attended and they hoped it became a regular event.

### Acknowledgment

We would like to thank our Partners; World Health Organization for funding the event, and the Fiji School of Medicine for providing the venue. Special thanks to the WHO Representative to the South Pacific, Dr. Chen Ken, the Minister for Health, Dr. Neil Sharma, Permanent Secretary for Health, Dr. Salanieta Saketa and the Dean of Fiji School of Medicine, Professor Ian Rouse for personally attending and supporting the workshop. We also acknowledge presenters who had traveled from abroad at their own cost and staff of MoH Fiji for making this event a success.



## Reference

1. National Health Research Systems. Report of an International Workshop. Thailand: World Health Organisation; 2001. Available from: URL: <http://www.who.int/rpc/meetings/en/ChaamDoc.pdf>
2. Strengthening Health Systems to Improve Health Outcomes. WHO's Framework for Action. Geneva: World Health Organisation; 2007. Available from: URL: [http://www.who.int/healthsystems/round9\\_2.pdf](http://www.who.int/healthsystems/round9_2.pdf)
3. Cuboni HD, Finau SA, Wainiqolo I and Cuboni G. Fijian Participation in Health Research: Analysis of Medline Publications 1965 – 2002. Pacific Health Dialog. 2004. Mar 11(1): 59 – 78.
4. Annual Report 2008. Ministry of Health Women Social Welfare and Poverty Alleviation. p 54.
5. Block MAG. Health Policy and Systems Research Agendas in Developing Countries. Health Research Policy and Systems. 2004. 2(6). Available from: URL: <http://www.health-policy-systems.com/content/2/1/6>

*“What we are living with is the result of human choices and it can be changed by making better, wiser choices”*

*Robert Redford*

