
Guest Editorial Perspective

COM-FSM Joins the Health “Extended Family”

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I join Secretary Skilling in thanking all those who contributed manuscripts or otherwise supported this edition, and offer congratulations to the editorial board for their efforts and dedication for bringing to publication this edition of *Pacific Health Dialog: Health Issues in the Federated States of Micronesia*. The College of Micronesia-FSM is both pleased and proud to be a partner in this collaborative effort.

This edition reflects a committed and collaborative response to a challenge of producing a journal that focuses on the health issues and challenges in Micronesia and highlights the unique and significant developments in research and interventions specific to the FSM. Having this issue published is the result of the diligence and persistence of the editorial board, but more importantly through reaching out in a highly collaborative effort to the “extended family” for health stretching across Micronesia and beyond.

You will find some of the FSM “senior voices” of the extended health family represented in this edition. As seasoned researchers and health professionals that have lived, worked, researched and contributed to advancing health in the Federated States of Micronesia over the years, they offer a historical perspective and more recent descriptions and definitions of the health issues facing Micronesia. Among the voices in this edition are Fr. Francis Hezel of Micronesian Seminar; Marcus Samo, FSM Assistant Secretary of Health, and his colleagues; and Drs. Mark Durand and Greg Dever, former directors of health services for Yap and Palau. They are more recently joined by Dr. Boris Pavlin, WHO epidemiologist assigned to Micronesia; Dr. Lois Englberger, research advisor to the Island Food Community; Dr. Giuseppe Cuboni, professor and coordinator of the College of Micronesia-FSM Public Health program; and Dr. Hien Do Cuboni, professor and public health researcher whose technical and administrative support from a distance made this project a seamless undertaking for all.

In short, Fr Hezel’s contribution on the historical survey of disease in Micronesia combined with the two articles from Assistant Secretary Samo and his colleagues clearly highlight a major and significant shift in FSM morbidity and mortality pattern. While communicable diseases of previous decades continue to remain public health concerns in the FSM, there has been a significant increase in non-communicable diseases presently impacting the health of the people of the FSM bringing many challenges to the health care systems.



It is notably exciting to see contributions and voices in this PHD of younger Micronesian health professionals as first time contributors to a peer-reviewed publication. Their articles provide details for some of the more specific health challenges they encounter in their clinical settings across the four states of the FSM. The college is pleased to note that several of the younger contributors in this edition started their college studies at COM-FSM in our own Health Careers Opportunity Program.

The FSM, like other Pacific countries, faces the double disparity of health worker shortages and under-trained staff. The *Pre-Health Talent Search* project reported in this edition aimed to increase the number of high school students interested in health careers. While this Pre-Health Talent Search project is now an annual event of the college, the lessons learned from that project are informing upcoming recruitment projects aimed at attracting high school students into health careers. Health workforce training needs across the Micronesian region are being addressed by the member institutions of the Pacific Postsecondary Education Council (PPEC) through existing training programs, and, in collaboration with Pacific Island Health Officers Association, through the development of new programs. More recently, with support from the Micronesia Area Health Education Center program funded through the US Department of Health and Human Services, a new accredited Public Health Training Program (PHTP) is now offered at COM-FSM. Upon completing all required courses, students can earn an AS degree in Public Health. The FSM will soon be joining its Micronesian neighbors in offering a nursing program at home to address this shortage. The college appreciates being a member of the health extended family. We also welcome the opportunity to be a partner in the planning for more opportunities to provide high quality training on island at our local institutions to strengthen the health workforce for the FSM and the region.

Our college mission includes language that we are “uniquely Micronesian” which has given rise to our Micronesian Studies Program and a conscious effort on the part of the college to reflect on cultural traditions, promote and conduct research, and include in our curriculum opportunities for students to learn and preserve valuable traditional knowledge and practices. In this light, I am pleased to find that PHD has included articles that address culture perspectives and practices. The articles, *Meeting Chamorro Women’s Health Care Need*, by Rosario and, *Perspective on a Testicular Mass in a 4 year old boy*, by Alfonso, give a voice to more questions and research for how traditional health practices and cultural perspectives can hinder or help health care delivery. Also reported in this edition is the research and community education work being done by Dr. Lois Englberger, her research colleagues, and the Island Food Community of Pohnpei to emphasize the benefits of traditional island food, which relate to culture, health, environment, economy, and food security. Traditional health perspectives, “local medicine” practices, and island foods for health are areas of practice and research that must not be overlooked. There are many opportunities for the college and health extended families to collaborate in research, training and community outreach programs. I encourage the other PPEC institutions, particularly those with Land Grant Cooperative Research and Extension programs, to work closely with the health services in these efforts.



The collaborative endeavor that resulted in this unique edition of PHD serves as the model of how the FSM and the extended families of health and education can work to improve health care and the lives of our family members across the Pacific. The College of Micronesia-FSM is committed to being a contributing part of this family. This truly marks a start of a beginning for all of us.

Again, I thank the editorial board and those involved in this undertaking for bringing this edition to fruition.

Sincerely,



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