

9 May 2012

East Timorese nutritionists head to Central Australia for training

Alice Springs will this week become a training ground for a team of Timor Leste nutritionists.

In a unique partnership with the young nation's Ministry for Health, Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) and Northern Territory Hospitals, five senior AusAID-funded nutritionists will receive practical education in their field via a week-long knowledge exchange with dietitians from the Alice Springs Hospital.

The following week – May 14 to 18 – the Timor Leste nutritionists will join 12 Indigenous women working in remote Indigenous communities to learn about nutrition for adolescent girls and women to be held at Alice Springs' Centre for Remote Health.

This is the third module the group has undertaken as part of the four module *Nutrition and Food Security – Approaches to improving the health of women and children* short course. The course, supported by AusAID through the Australia Leadership Awards (ALA) Fellowships program and The Fred Hollows Foundation, was developed by Menzies for nutrition partners working in remote Australian Indigenous communities as well as Asia and the Pacific.

Nutritionist and visit facilitator Judith Myers said the course will develop the capacity of health workers to work with families and encourage good health and nutrition practices in the context of a country with high rates of child malnutrition. Approximately 45% of children aged under five in Timor-Leste are underweight, and 58% have stunted growth – signifying chronic malnutrition. Adult nutrition is also of concern, especially for women. More than 33% of non-pregnant women are reported to be chronically underweight.

Practical observations and professional placements with Australian hospital dietitians will enhance the ability of the Timorese nutritionists to improve the delivery of health services in hospitals – especially management of severe malnutrition of children – and to improve continuous care, from the hospital to home communities.

The Timor nutrition project began last year and has so far involved three trips to attend short course modules and to undertake clinical placements in Alice Springs, Katherine and Darwin hospitals.

As Myers says: "We're aiming to help the senior Timorese nutritionists develop transferable skills, broaden their knowledge, skills and clinical nutrition experience to apply in Timor Leste settings and to train other Timorese nutritionists".

"The hospital placement will particularly help with Timor Leste hospital system's ability to manage severe malnutrition in children and adults; while the short course focuses on what works to improve good nutrition for women and children. It promotes the sharing of knowledge and experience between health and nutrition workers from Timor Leste and remote Indigenous communities in the NT – both of whom face similar nutrition and food security issues," she says.

Media Opportunity:

What: Quick info update on 'Food for patients with malnutrition'

Where: Allied Health Department, Alice Springs Hospital

When: 11am, Thursday 10 May

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