

Thursday 20 October

Health and Nutrition: from Timor to the Territory

A unique health and nutrition program has brought six senior nutritionists from Timor Leste to spend this week at Royal Darwin Hospital to receive practical training in nutrition from the hospital's dietitians.

This program has developed out of an initial partnership between the Timor Leste Ministry of Health and Royal Darwin Hospital (RDH).

Director of Menzies, Professor Jonathan Carapetis said the health and nutrition program is funded by AusAID, through the Australian Leadership Award Fellowship scheme (ALAF).

"We are working with the Timor Leste Ministry of Health to provide a program that includes training in infant and child nutrition, visits to Indigenous communities and placements in Northern Territory hospitals," Professor Carapetis said.

Nutritionist and visit facilitator Judith Myers said as part of the program, senior fellows from the Timor Leste Ministry of Health and World Health Organisation will undertake professional placements with dietitians at RDH to observe the operations of a sizable food system.

"The hospital placement will enhance the ability of the fellows to improve the continuity of care for children with malnutrition from the hospital to the community in Timor Leste," Ms Myers said.

Head of Nutrition in the Timor Leste Ministry of Health Dirce Maria Soares said the training and experience will help strengthen their approach to improving health and nutrition in Timor.

"We will use what we learn from this program for our own community and clinical nutrition programs," Ms Soares said. "The information and resources will help train our community workers.

"The health system is not the same in Timor Leste, there are a lot of challenges but a continuation of a partnership can help us to go back and have a good plan to develop more skills and training in our country."

This is the second week of their training; last week they attended a course with Indigenous health and nutrition workers at the Menzies School of Health Research, which was supported by The Fred Hollows Foundation and AusAID.

"The course was an opportunity for both teams to share their stories and learn new skills from each other that will help them work towards a common goal to improve the health of women and children in Territory communities and Timor Leste," Ms Myers said.

“The course is designed to help develop the skills of health and nutrition workers to work with families to encourage good health and nutrition practices including breast feeding, healthy diet, the importance of social interaction and identifying any health problems early.”

Media Opportunity

What: The Timor Leste team will be working with RDH dietitians giving nutrition advice, weighing people and serving a healthy lunch as part of Nutrition Week.

Where: Royal Darwin Hospital

Time: 12.30 pm

Nutritionist and visit facilitator Judith Myers will be available for interview.

Timor Leste senior nutritionist Dirce Maria Soares will be available for interview.

For media enquiries please contact Jenna Hoare on 0407 181 894.