

Thursday, 1 May 2014

Forum to forge path to end rheumatic heart disease

Two hundred international leading experts and advocates for rheumatic heart disease (RHD) will converge at the *Third Global Rheumatic Heart Disease Forum* in Melbourne next week.

Government officials, public and private sector stakeholders and non-government organisation representatives (NGOs) will join academic leaders and clinical experts to develop a roadmap to alleviate the suffering of the estimated 15.6 million people living with RHD worldwide.

They will meet on Monday, 5 May during the World Congress of Cardiology 2014 to review global initiatives and to identify future priorities in the effort to ultimately eradicate RHD.

Devastatingly, RHD is preventable and controllable. It is estimated that over 233,000 people from around the world die from RHD each year, with 282,000 new cases diagnosed annually.

Director of RHD Australia, Professor Bart Currie said the event will address global challenges in controlling RHD and discuss what needs to be done to eradicate the disease.

“Some regions of Australia have amongst the highest recorded rates of RHD in the world, which affects mostly Indigenous children and young adults,” Professor Currie said.

A panel discussion with Australian and international government officials, NGOs, clinicians and RHD advocates will provide a broad perspective to the challenges of tackling RHD, among them, poverty and overcrowded housing.

The Forum will identify opportunities to control RHD globally, demonstrate the value of a coordinated national approach, review barriers to reach the five targets of the World Heart Federation to control rheumatic fever (RF) and RHD, and provide a patient’s perspective from a young Australian Indigenous person living with RHD.

The World Heart Federation will produce a Forum report to summarise priority actions towards the roadmap to implement a strategy, similar to the previous two forums.

RHDAustralia, RhEACH and the World Heart Federation will host the Third Global Rheumatic Heart Disease Forum.

Media interviews and registration to attend the Forum

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Media are welcome to attend the Forum.

Professor Bart Currie, Director of RHD Australia is available for interview.

Background information

RHD is caused by one or more episodes acute rheumatic fever (ARF). These repeated episodes leave the heart valves damaged and they can no longer function adequately, leading to heart failure and sometimes the need for cardiac surgery or death. ARF is caused by the body's autoimmune response to an infection by Group A streptococcus bacteria, and is commonly seen in children from Indigenous communities across Central and Northern Australia. ARF occurs mainly in children aged between five and 20, and affects a number of areas of the body, including the joints, brain, skin and heart.

About RHD Australia

RHD Australia is the National Coordination Unit for RHD and aims to reduce death and disability from acute rheumatic fever and RHD. Funded by the Australian Government Department of Health, RHD Australia is based at the Menzies School of Health Research. The National Coordination Unit was established in 2009 as part of the National Rheumatic Fever Strategy.