

Monday 5 May 2014

## Heads come together to control rheumatic heart disease

The *Third Global Rheumatic Heart Disease Forum*, to be held tonight in Melbourne during the World Congress of Cardiology 2014, will establish a time-bound and outcome focused roadmap to control and improve outcomes for people with rheumatic heart disease (RHD).

Acute rheumatic fever (ARF) is rare in most developed countries, yet Australia has one of the highest recorded rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the world. RHD affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 26 times more than non-Indigenous people.

Professor Bart Currie, Director of RHD Australia said in Australia we have established RHD control programs but there are challenges to reduce the burden of the disease.

“The Forum will include break-out groups to forge a way ahead to achieve the World Heart Federation’s five targets and address the barriers to ARF and RHD control,” said Professor Currie.

“In Australia, limited knowledge of ARF and RHD by health staff, patients and communities can lead to misdiagnosis, so RHD Australia developed a national guideline, e-learning modules and community awareness resources.”

The forum will review global initiatives and identify future priorities in the effort to ultimately eradicate RHD.

A panel discussion with key stakeholders will include Australia’s Chief Medical Officer, Professor Chris Baggoley, Telethon Kids Institute and RhEACH Director and RHD expert, Professor Jonathan Carapetis, Fiji’s Minister for Health, Dr Neil Sharma, New Zealand’s Minister for Health, Tariana Turia, and the World Heart Federation’s President Srinath Reddy, among others.

Professor Jonathan Carapetis, co-director of RhEACH said the potential of the Forum provides an unparalleled opportunity to form a comprehensive strategy to tackle RHD around the world.

“By exploring the role of control programs, penicillin supplies, RHD champions, training hubs and vaccine development we can achieve global RHD control,” said Professor Carapetis.

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

### Media contact

Media are welcome to attend the Forum. Contact Emmanuelle Clarke, RHD Australia Senior Communications Officer phone 0408 801 640 or email [emmanuelle.clarke@menzies.edu.au](mailto:emmanuelle.clarke@menzies.edu.au)

### 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



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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.