

PRESS RELEASE

CLAIMING HEALTHY FUTURES

The largest annual gathering of Pacific health workers and professionals from the region took place at the Sofitel Hotel, Nadi this week. The theme for the conference was *'Claiming healthy futures' with clinical themes of 'Cancer' and 'Child and Maternal health'*.

The conference, which was opened by the Hon Minister for Health of Fiji, Dr Neil Sharma, is a collaboration between Pasifika Medical Association (PMA), Fiji Medical Association (FMA) and the Fiji National University (FNU) was attended by about 350 health workers from the Pacific region. Delegates included Directors and Secretaries of Health from 10 Pacific countries, AusAID representatives, WHO and UNICEF representatives and senior officials from New Zealand. More than 120 local participants also participated.

Pasifika Medical Association and international delegates were honoured by the opening ceremony which included a traditional welcome and kava ceremony. Dr Kiki Maoate, President of Pasifika Medical Association said "the honour bestowed on the Pasifika Medical Association was humbling and reminded us all that we are connected through kinship ties, hearts and souls and the service to our people..."

Keynote speakers included Dr Rigamoto Taito, Head of Paediatrics, and Lautoka Hospital who gave a practical example of what happens when committed clinicians in the region work with donors in a twinning arrangement (Lautoka and Christchurch hospitals) to help children with cancers in Fiji. Dr Eliab Some, Chief of Health and Sanitation at UNICEF spoke of his organisation's on-going commitment to the children in the region and supporting health workers. Dr Johan Morreau, Chair of the New Zealand Paediatric and Child Health Division,



Royal Australian College of Physicians (RACP), was one of many non-Pacific guests who spoke of their commitment and willingness to work in the Pacific region in supporting their colleagues.

At a pre-conference meeting, the Pasifika Paediatric Association (PPA), which will be supported by PMA, was inaugurated and Dr Joseph Kado (Fiji) was elected President. Dr Morreau on behalf of RACP will work with both PMA and PPA to support the strengthening and development of the region's Paediatric workforce. This initiative encouraged other specialities like Internal Medicine clinicians to meet during the conference and discuss how they can also be supported by PMA in also establishing networking links with the RACP.

First Lady of the Republic of Fiji, Adi Koila Nailatikau was the chief guest at the annual PMA conference dinner and spoke of her work with the Fiji White Ribbon Trust for Safe motherhood. Pasifika Medical Association raised \$2000 towards the Trust during a *taolunga* dance performed by Ms Natasha Greer, Communications and Events Manager for the Pasifika Medical Association.

During the dinner, the *PMA service award* was awarded to Dr Jioji Malani (Fiji) in recognition of his long history of service to medicine and workforce development in the region and especially Fiji - which involved both clinical practice and in the teaching of medical students.

The conference participants agreed to continually work to strengthen the partnerships and networking of national professional organisations in the region and with their New Zealand and Australian counterparts while working with development partners. There was also an emphasis on continually strengthening research that will better inform policy development for countries in the future and that the annual PMA conference continues to be a tool for the continued development of Pacific health.

The conference delegates released a communiqué – *Claiming Healthy Futures Nadi 2011* which is attached.

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