

Manna from Pakistan

From Jenny Horton of Kenmore Club
 on the Polio Eradication Trail

"Jenny Horton" <yen283@bigpond.com>

Email No.10: July 2007

Assalam Alaikum....my dear friends,

Polio in Australia after 21 years

This was like a bombshell when I read this and am sure it was the same to everyone else. So how do we feel about this?

To me it was not unexpected....while we have virus in any part of the world there will always be importations into other countries.... polio virus needs no visa....it can travel often very innocently (only 1:200 P1 virus and 1:1000 P3 infected persons actually develop paralysis). Then after someone is infected with polio virus, it is shed for up to 60 days....where have you been in the last 60 days??? This is a long time.

Passengers exposed to polio

Article from: 



A NATIONAL health alert has been issued, particularly for airline passengers, after a 22-year-old Pakistani man was diagnosed with polio, the first case reported in Australia since 1986.

To me it is truly great that the doctors in Australia diagnosed this case. Having had no polio for 21 years, I am sure this diagnosis was not on the tip of the doctor's tongue.

This is exactly how the outbreak in Indonesia started. One imported case that spread. The difference for Australia is that our routine immunization is at high levels and has been for a long period. So a majority of us should have developed antibodies to polio, and therefore be able to resist the disease if exposed. But it tells us that while we have one infected child, others are vulnerable. Polio usually attacks children but not solely; remember that President Roosevelt got polio at the age of 39 years. In those days there was no vaccine (1921), so the lesson is to ensure that all children are fully vaccinated and when any of us travel seek advice from a doctor.

What when we find a polio case?

A detailed history is taken from the patient including all locations visited prior to the symptoms initially appearing and after onset. This is carefully traced ensuring all those close to the patient and all in the vicinity are vaccinated. In the case of travel, all areas visited are investigated and individual decisions made. Here in Pakistan we

- trace the travel history and contacts
- search for undetected cases
- examine the routine immunization coverage of the children living nearby
- review the surveillance system.



Melbourne Rotarian Jenny Coburn supports Zac

Then manage a mopping up program where at least 2 million children will be vaccinated around the area that the polio infected person visited. Each case has an origin and thanks to technology the virus can be genotyped and we can see exactly to which previous case it was related. This shows us also if we are missing polio cases and the actual links between cases. This again is how they traced the Indonesia cases back to Saudi Arabia and then to Nigeria.

Right now for this case the investigation is going on here and a mopping up program will follow. This is urgent as we need to ensure there are no missed cases and strengthen the surveillance so all are on high alert.

Each case and response puts an extra strain on the budget. Plus there are also costs in Australia and any other country that may have people at risk from this case. This is one of the reasons we have been short of funds in Polio Eradication. Please remember Polio Plus in your club plans this year. The program needs your support. Sadly for the patient there is no cure, although physio may assist in some cases.

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My Move...

I have now moved to Islamabad to live and have a new position. I am working with the Federal Polio Cell as a Technical Officer. This is covering resource management, field activities for Islamabad for polio and measles and as a focal point nationally for communication and social mobilization. I am sure it will challenge me yet again but certainly Islamabad is an easier place to live than Karachi. I will travel more and see how things operate in other provinces and work within the team to see how we can improve.

We are at a vital point in the program and have to interrupt virus circulation here this year. Our real test lies ahead in the coming months, as we enter the peak season when virus spreads more readily. But we must win this war....and do it now.



We catch up with the nomad children

One of my first trips was back to Karachi to assist with the recent campaign there. It was good to be with my friends and colleagues again. As difficult as it was living there, I grew to love many people and truly appreciate their efforts in wiping out polio from Pakistan. One day in the campaign, we went to check a nomad camp and found it had moved just a few days previous. We then tracked them down to another area and as the car pulled up, they realized we were polio vaccinators. The Town Health Officer, Dr Jawed, and I were swamped with mothers wanting vaccine for their children and even children bringing other children. In a very short time we vaccinated 35 children, of which 15 were under 6 months (we chose the babies first). Then we ran out of vaccine. It was an awesome sight for us, seeing all these mothers coming to seek vaccine.

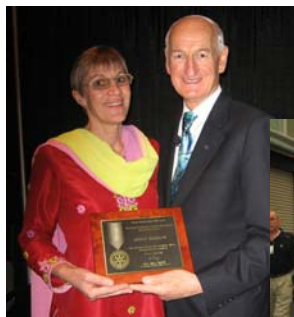


Children bring Children!

It is the nomads who we are missing in campaigns and had we not tracked them down maybe they would have been missed again. Dr Jawed, Asghar (my driver) and I left there feeling like God had taken us there especially. It was incredible. This was like a reward at the end of a hot hard day in the field. What our work is all about...reaching every child every time.

Rotary International Convention

Thanks to President Bill Boyd, I was invited to speak at the RI Convention in Salt Lake City. For me this was an awesome experience...to stand up before so many and share my passion for a polio free world and to receive the Service Above Self Award from the President. That came about because of my Youth Exchange year in Frederick, Oklahoma.



RIP Bill presents the Award

With friends Cliff, Dan and Una



NEVER will I ever be able to repay the debt to those Rotarians who put SERVICE ABOVE SELF to host me in their homes. Also those Rotarians who prepared me for that experience...especially PDG Bill Forrest of Tamworth and my home club of Walcha. BUT mostly my parents who had enough trust in Rotary to send their daughter to another country to people they did not know.

One of those host dads planted the polio seed in my heart ...PDG Jim Loftis. On a visit with him and Neita Faye in Oklahoma, he passionately told me of his involvement with Polio Plus. Neither of us knew the road that I would later walk with him and many millions of others as we strive to reach a polio free world.

How blessed can one person be. I really thank all those who supported me at Convention, daily calming my nerves and those who supported from afar...especially my Mum. Thanks, seems so small, but it is sincerely heartfelt.

Allah hafiz,
 Jenny. WHO Team in Pakistan