



PRESS RELEASE

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SDP Aerial Health Patrols Flying Again

Last week, the PNG Sustainable Development Program (SDP) recommenced its Aerial Health Patrols to provide primary health care to remote Western Province communities. The service had been interrupted by the State of Emergency. This time, a three-day patrol visited the Morehead Health Centre, located close to the Indonesian border.

The small team of three nurses who work there was particularly grateful to have the AHP team in their community. “After so many years, this was an answer to our prayers, finally someone has come to help us,” said Sister Guma, Officer-in-Charge at the Morehead Health Centre.



Sr. Guma Kaliya, Officer-in-Charge at the Morehead Health Centre, South Fly District, WP.

“We had heard about COVID-19 of course, but we were confused, and very afraid. We had no masks but we knew we had to keep ourselves safe. So everyone stayed in their houses,” she said.

“Since the lockdown when people got sick, they came and stood outside on the road, and the only advice we could offer was by shouting backwards and forwards. If we did have a drug to help them, we had to leave it on the steps to be collected later,” she added.

The AHP team flew in urgently needed face masks, drugs, vaccines, hand sanitizers and soap, snakebite bandages and anti-venom. The urgently required supplies were delivered by AHP’s seven-member patrol team. These medical and health professionals conducted clinics, provided training (e.g. snake bite treatment); and delivered a comprehensive community awareness program to help tackle the COVID-19 risk of

personal infection.

Sister Guma said the visit provided a huge boost to the whole community with AHP team working with community leaders, the nurses and the school.

The AHP HEO provided advice and medicines to patients with long-standing chronic complaints. They also provided referrals to Daru Hospital for use after the lockdown.

“We had very few drugs; no vaccines and we have not had snake bite anti-venom for over twenty years. We all felt very emotional when the AHP team arrived bringing all these supplies to us.”

The Health Centre has reopened after nearly two months of closure because the staff now have face masks.

“Since the lockdown, we were struggling to help the community understand physical distancing, hand washing and mask wearing because we had no soap or face masks. The AHP team worked with the community and the school, teaching hand washing technique, handing out COVID-19 awareness leaflets, masks and bars of soap. This took a lot of pressure off health facility staff; and released the tension in the community,” said Sister Guma.

Morehead is also located in a tuberculosis (TB) hotspot, but they have no capacity to test or treat this disease. The Health Centre nurses have been sending patients to Daru for testing. But this is not an easy journey. The traveler has to spend two hours by truck on a rough road to get to Arufi, and then another six hours by dinghy to Daru. Eight people who have traveled to Daru this year have all tested positive to TB.

The AHP medical team also gave snakebite training to Health Worker staff (how to use the special bandages and administer the anti-venom). Sister Guma said they had many deaths due to snakebites because they could only treat the patients with herbs and mango juice, but from today “after so many years, we can now save lives.”



Snakebite training included the use of 15m snake bite bandages that are printed with rectangles, which turn to squares, when the correct pressure has been reached.

As the AHP was departing, this is what Sister Guma said: “All these things, we have never seen before and we are very impressed about them. Morehead is a very big station looking after many people across the South Fly plains. We didn’t know how to seek help, and then you came by surprise, and we don’t know what to say, but only to thank you all.”