



WELCOME REMARKS

By the Director of National Research Institute, Dr Thomas Webster on the Launch of a New NRI Report

BEHAVIOURAL SURVEILLANCE RESEARCH IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT ENCLAVES IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA: A Study with Oil Search Limited

6th October, 2011

Salutations:

- Honorable Jamie Maxton Graham, - Minister for Health and HIV AIDS,
- Members of the Diplomatic Corp,
- Health Department and other Government Representatives,
- Oil Search Limited Representatives
- Members of the Media Organizations
- Friends and Colleagues.

Let me first of all welcome you all to another launch of a research report by the National Research Institute, this time by the Behavioral Surveillance Research Project team.

Interventions in addressing the spread of HIV - new infections, need to be informed and based on research evidence with policies and strategies tailored to address specific groups in our population. The latter point is important as PNGs social, cultural and geographical settings is quite diverse and the impact of modern developments affects each group differently. We need to understand their sexual practices, their knowledge about HIV, their ideas, beliefs and attitudes about sex and their relationships with partners. We need to understand where they are most vulnerable and at risk and identify appropriate measures to reduce those risk factors.

The Behavioral Surveillance Research Project at NRI was set up in 2007 under an agreement with the National Department of Health for a HIV Prevention in Rural Enclave Sites with funding support from the Asian Development Bank. A number of sites were selected and studies have been undertaken and the team and the research reports released. The most recent one released early this year was on the WR Carpenters Plantations in Western Highlands and the new Jiwaka Province.

The report released today is based on surveys conducted with Oil Search workforce working across seven different sites. I want to acknowledge the support and thank the Oil Search Management for their support of the study, not only providing access to the workers, but also in the logistics of getting there. We also thank the workers who willingly gave their time and information about their personal lives that are confidential. This information is indeed confidential and we have taken every precaution to ensure that the individual identities of the informants are protected.

The data generated has been tabulated and presented telling us a general overall picture of their beliefs, their knowledge and their sexual practices that helps us to construct a scenario of common and statistically significant findings. The research report presents these data in helping us to understand where the risks are, and what sort of preventive measures in both policy and practices can be developed to reduce the spread of HIV for not only Oil Search Employees but also other Mining Development Areas with similar settings and workers.

We want to take the opportunity to thank the Department of Health and especially the National Department of Health Surveillance Technical Working Group for their support of the project. We also thank the National AIDS Council for their support. It is our hope and wish that the research findings will now be used in the various HIV Intervention work being undertaken by the Health Department, NACS, the various partners and stakeholders including major project developers at mines and other rural development enclaves.

I want to also take the opportunity to thank the Department of Health to agree and support the continuation of the Behavioral Research Project here at NRI for another four years. We have just signed up an agreement with the Health Department commencing next year. The finer details of financing are still being worked on. So I hope this can be concluded soon with some firm arrangements in place before the end of the year.

I am really proud of the team led by Dr. Holly Aruwafu. Four years ago, Holly had a team of young researchers green around the ears but willing to work hard and learn. One or two have left but most have remained. They have learnt and matured over this time. The quality of the research report on the WR Carpenters and now the work on the Oil Search sites is evidence of

the hard work that they have put in and also the skills and knowledge that they have acquired. I want to especially thank Holly for the mentoring and the drive to produce quality work.

I want to retain the team that has really blossomed over the last four years and this requires guarantees from the Health Department.

Minister, the Project has also generated findings related to public health issues. Information on quality of clinics, advisory services, treatment clinics, availability of drugs etc. These findings generate questions for policy in the area of public health that we need to address.

Whilst the Institute of Medical Research does some excellent work in the scientific areas, there are limited capabilities for analyses in Public Health Policy.

Public Health Research Policy needs to be linked to the disciplines of economics, of governance such as financial management, sub national governance arrangements etc. These are research disciplines that exist at NRI.

I would like NRI to establish a Public Health Policy Research Program that can help us to understand better the Health Issues working with the established disciplines of economics, our work on sub national governance arrangements and off course with the HIV Behavioral Research Program team.

The well being of people are also determined by their beliefs, behaviors and practices and so we need to understand them better for Government to develop appropriate policies and programs in order to have a healthy population.

I have spoken to the acting Health Secretary on this proposal and he has expressed his support. I have therefore officially written lodging a request with the Health Department to support a Research Program in this area.

I do not want to take any more of your time. I congratulate Holly and the team for the production of this Research Report.

And thank you all for coming to be with us here on this occasion.