

WORLD CHILDREN'S DAY AT CWMH, FIJI

24 November 2023

INTRODUCTION

World Children's Day (WCD) and International Day of People with Disabilities (IDPwD) have been celebrated at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital (CWMH) Suva, Fiji!



Asha Hamilton (NCP Scholar with CLAN and CWMH) joins the CAH Community of Fiji in front of banner and decorations

World Children's Day (20th November) is an annual day to mark the celebration and recognition of children across the world. This was the first time CWMH has used this awareness day to celebrate their many resilient children living with Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH) and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

This year celebrations were held on the 24th of November due to a cyclone warning put in place on the 14th of November which disrupted the planning process. Despite these obstacles, the event ran smoothly on the day. Families travelled from across the wider Suva to join in the celebrations which were proudly supported by the Fijian Ministry of Health and CLAN (Caring & Living as Neighbours).

There were 9 CAH families who joined this first celebration of WCD and IDPwD. The event was attended by the Australian High Commission's First Secretary of Health, Ms Fleur Calcutt, Medical Superintendent Dr Luke Nasedra, various Heads of Department including Neurology, heads of nursing staff, representatives from CWMH's partners Frank Hilton and Tamavua Rehabilitation Hospital, and several paediatric doctors and nurses who were keen to celebrate and support.

CHIEF GUEST ADDRESS



Chief guest, First Secretary of Health from the Australian High Commission delivering her address

The event program began with a welcome address from the Head of Paediatrics, Dr Ilisapeci Tuibeqa, and was followed by an opening prayer and traditional garlanding ceremony for the chief guest.

Ms Fleur Calcutt's keynote speech highlighted the strong partnership enjoyed by Fiji and Australia and really spoke to the long-term, collaborative initiatives to invest in the health of Fiji's children. This speech was very encouraging for all, and spoke to the deep commitment the Australian High Commission and DFAT have to collaborating with Fiji to improve the health needs of all children in Fiji.

LEARNING MORE ABOUT CAH

Following the chief guest's address, it was time for the educational aspect of the day. This session was delivered by CWMH paediatrician Dr Emily Vadiga.



Dr Emily Vadiga delivering her educational talk

Dr Emily's speech started with a general explanation of CAH, emphasising the fact CAH is an inherited condition, and families are not "to blame" in any way for their child having CAH. The presentation addressed many of the commonly asked questions families have, as well as helped special guests gain a better understanding of the condition and how to manage it. In this way, the session not only benefited families keen to learn more about CAH, but also helped raise general awareness about how this condition is affecting the lives of children and families in Fiji.

PARENT TESTIMONY

A real highlight of the whole day was the speech shared by Mr Isimeli Cacgia, a loving father of four children, two of whom are living with CAH. Mr Cacgia generously shared his and his family's experiences in a talk that was an incredibly moving and inspirational aspect of the day.

Mr Cacgia spoke from the heart about the struggles he and his wife experienced following their children's diagnosis. Interestingly, some of the hardships families face have nothing to do with CAH... Mr Cacgia spoke

about the external judgments families experience after their child is diagnosed with a chronic condition, and stigma from the broader community. Even well-meaning family and friends can share advice that is not helpful, and Mr Cacgia shared wisdom on how best to respond in these situations.

Powerfully, Mr Cacgia also spoke about ways his family's lives have been enriched by CAH. Whilst there are many difficulties, it was also incredibly moving to hear the ways CAH had brought positives into their lives. This included the impact on his children who do not have CAH, with one inspired to become a doctor to help his sister; as well as the interesting employment opportunities now open to his wife as a result of her unique experiences and expertise caring for children with special health needs.

Hearing from a parent who has been directly affected by CAH was incredibly impactful. It allowed all families to feel heard and understood and it helped hospital staff and other guests to better understand the personal impact living with a chronic condition has on both children and families.



Mr Isimeli Cacgia during his testimony

CWMH'S PARTNERS' SHARE UPDATES

Frank Hilton Organisation



Mr Pravneil Chand (FHO) delivers his address

Mr Pravneil Chand, a representative from CWMH's partner institution Frank Hilton shared an address with participants. The Frank Hilton Organisation is an organisation dedicated to providing essential services to children in the community who are living with a wide range of disabilities and chronic conditions.

Mr Pravneil's message reinforce the importance of early intervention and shared information on the broad range of services Frank Hilton makes available for the community. Families were encouraged to reach out if they needed support.

Tamavua Rehabilitation Hospital



CLAN intern Asha Hamilton, CAH patient and Strikia Kumar during the celebrations

The address from Tamavua representative, Srtitika Kumar echoed a similar message of encouragement and support. The importance of changing mindsets to acknowledge the vital role of children's care and rehabilitation was emphasised.

Ms Srtitika also made guests aware of the new National Disability Inclusive Health and Rehabilitation Action Plan that were recently launched by the Fijian government and aim to boost rehabilitative services in Fiji.

HOSPITAL IN THE HOME

CWMH's innovative, new Hospital in the Home (HITH) Program has allowed staff to have increased contact with patients and families in their home environment, and learn more about their concerns and priorities. Families of children living with chronic health conditions consistently speak about their need to connect with others and learn more, so this event was a great opportunity to celebrate a childhood NCD that has not had as much attention as other conditions such as type 1 diabetes, cancer and RHD.



CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS



This day was a huge success thanks to the collaboration between the Fijian Ministry of Health, CLAN, Dr Ilisapeci Tuibeqa and the team of paediatric doctors and nursing staff of CWMH who all brought their passions together to ensure the day was a joyful celebration that would be remembered by children and families for years to come.

CLAN was honoured to have been able to support the paediatric department at CWMH in preparing for this Community event. A range of educational resource materials were shared on the day, and will continue to be made available to families and health professionals nationally, to help increase the education and understanding of CAH in Fiji.



A new brochure that provides clear information on CAH and the appropriate action to take when a child with CAH is sick was launched, as were Flip Charts that will be introduced in clinical settings, for use by nurses and doctors to explain CAH to families during admissions to the hospital.

CLAN was especially thrilled to help families receive free, colourful T-shirts celebrating CAH - these were highly prized souvenirs of a happy day. Thank you to everyone for making the day a joyful celebration!