

Essential Pain Management Débuts in Papua

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A young Papuan woman involved in an accident and suffering from a broken femur lies on a stretcher at the general hospital in Jayapura, awaiting treatment.

Surprisingly, she holds an expressionless look on her face despite not being on any pain medication though naturally admitting to being in great agony. The resident doctors explain to Dr Roger Goucke that this is likely due to a high tolerance of pain, learned through a 'hard way of life'.



Image: A group discussion assesses local pain management problems and solutions

The inaugural Essential Pain Management (EPM) workshop in Jayapura was held between 12 – 14 July 2017 as part of the RACS Global Health program in Papua and West Papua. The program, supported by Australian Aid, is focused on health services, workforce development and capacity building through medical education with local health personnel in the management, treatment and after-care of patients in the region.

Across the globe and especially in low-resource settings, inadequate treatment of acute and chronic pain is a vast problem. EPM is an international program developed by Dr Roger Goucke and Dr Wayne Morris and began in Papua New Guinea, with workshops since held in over 40 countries. The EPM was developed to improve knowledge of pain and to address pain management barriers by providing a simple framework for treating pain.

Excitingly, EPM was brought to Papua, Indonesia for the first time in July this year. Papua is the largest and easternmost province of Indonesia, bordered by Papua New Guinea to the east with Jayapura the capital of Papua.

It was here in Jayapura where 115 enthusiastic participants attended 4 full-day EPM workshops over 3 days, conducted in both Bahasa Indonesia and English. Thirteen new instructors were certified and went on to run subsequent classes with mentorship and supervision.

Participants came from a wide range of surgical specialties

including general surgery, orthopaedic surgery, paediatric surgery and urology. Medical backgrounds also included anaesthesia, obstetrics and gynecology, oncology, general practice, nursing and midwifery.

The Australian co-founder of EPM and visiting coordinator, Dr Roger Goucke observed that, "No matter what level of training, the attendees learned all we had to share very humbly and were open to the new approach to pain."

The Indonesian coordinator of the EPM, Dr Diah Widyanti, explained that EPM is needed in the region because busy healthcare providers at major hospitals in Indonesia are often limited by their understanding of pain, which leads to unnecessary delays in treatment for the patient.

Participants said they thoroughly enjoyed the informal and interactive format of the course and easy-going teaching style of the instructors, as well as the clear and structured material. They benefited from the workshop, both as a refresher and the new knowledge embedded through shared experiences by the instructors and colleagues from different specialities and hospitals.

Dr Rony, a surgeon from Yapen General Hospital in West Papua summed up general participant feedback. He said he gained a better understanding of pain management and will now think of combining different drugs and non-pharmacological treatments for different levels of pain, especially where there is limited access to medicine. He also said that when it comes to managing pain, delivering comfort and better treatment; EPM will help healthcare providers to remember that patients are people, not their illnesses.

Nurse Amatus Patiran from Dian Harapan Hospital in Jayapura felt that the workshop gave him new ideas on how to approach and work around barriers and found the Recognise, Assess, Treat (RAT) framework incredibly easy to recall and use for day-to-day pain scenarios.

Dr Goucke was pleased at the opportunity to bring the EPM to Jayapura, and said "It was fascinating and humbling conversing about patient's spiritual beliefs during the discussion on the meaning of pain and non-drug treatment options." He added that some challenges can be met locally by workforce education and through developing appropriate, targeted and informative material for patients.

Overall, he said "It was terrific to see so many different medical specialists come along. While there were a good number of surgeons and representation from different surgical specialities, and such a small number of anaesthetists, pain treatment clearly is everyone's business!"

The Health Services Development Program in Papua and West Papua, Indonesia was established at the request of the Coordinating Ministry for Political, Legal and Security of Indonesia and at the invitation of the Provincial Health Authority in Papua.

– With Veronica Verghese & Gwyn Low, RACS Global Health.