

Friday, July 8, 2016

Anglican Church at forefront of addressing sexual health problems in PNG

Meet Josepha Tametalong, the Coordinator of the Anglican Church of Papua New Guinea's Begaberi Clinic in Port Moresby who began working for the clinic around four years ago.

Currently Begaberi Clinic has 2000 people on their books, and they see average of 50-60 patients per day. Half of the 2000 are on treatment for HIV. There are 10 staff members employed, including five clinicians, a hygienist, a data clerk, and a receptionist. There is also a two-person psychosocial unit.

The clinic has built a solid reputation as a high quality service, amongst clients and local authorities. It was constructed as part of funding awarded to ABM from the PNG-Australia Sexual Health Improvement Program (PASHIP), an Australian government-funded, five-year initiative. The goal of that program was to reduce the rate of sexually transmitted infection by improving access to sexual healthcare services.

ABM Programs' Director, Dr Julianne Stewart said, "The clinic is making an incredible difference in the lives of so many people, and contributing to reducing the rates of infection and disease in the wider community of PNG."

The clinic was designed by Mother Sue Ramsden, wife of the former Bishop of Port Moresby, Bishop Peter Ramsden. It was deliberately designed to be visually similar to the nearby Anglican chapel of the Good Shepherd, since both are visible signs of the love and presence of God in that part of Port Moresby. Josepha notes that local people often comment that they don't know if Begaberi is a clinic or a church when they first see it.

There is a supportive atmosphere at Begaberi, where people feel they are not judged or stigmatised. They frequently comment about how welcome they felt when first arriving, and how the place is like a home. This has led to many more patients visiting the clinic, as the news travels by word of mouth. Many come from districts all over Port Moresby, some days so many that they need to be turned away. Begaberi can treat anyone, and there are even four Australians on their books.

Begaberi clinic is one of two centres established through the PASHIP program to test for and treat Sexually Transmitted Disease. The other centre is St Margaret's Hospital in Oro Bay, near Popondetta. Both centres have a reputation for high quality services and discretion, and are seeing increasing success in encouraging male spouses to attend for testing and treatment. There is a strong sense of ownership of the facilities by the local communities, and strong referral networks with other healthcare providers in the area.

Josepha wished to express her thanks to the staff of ABM, who worked so hard on the project. ABM would also like to thank Josepha and her team, and Anglicare PNG, the social service arm of the Anglican Church of PNG which is working to continue to provide this service.

ENDS

CONTACT Elizabeth Baker at media@abm.asn.au with enquiries.

The Anglican Board of Mission (ABM) is the national mission agency of the Anglican Church of Australia. For over 160 years ABM has been assisting people all over the world to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, provide health and education services, improve agricultural practices and strengthen the Church.