

WORLD CHILDREN'S DAY AT CWMH

FIJI 2023

Asha Hamilton,
December 2023

www.clanchildhealth.org



CAH children and families, CLAN intern Asha Hamilton in front of banner and decorations

INTRODUCTION

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

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 for CWMH to use this date to celebrate the resilient children of their paediatric community. It was decided to take this opportunity to celebrate children living with non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH) more specifically. This year the 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 the obstacles, families travelled from across the wider Suva to join in the celebrations which were supported by CLAN (Caring and Living as Neighbours) and the Ministry of Health Fiji.

For the first celebration of World Children's Day and International Day of People with Disabilities, 9 CAH children and their families were in attendance. The event was joined 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.

CHIEF GUEST ADDRESS



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

The event program began with a welcome by the Head of Paediatrics, Dr Ilisapeci Tuibeqa which was followed by an opening prayer and a traditional garlanding ceremony for the chief guest. It was then time for the chief guest, Ms Fleur Calcutt's keynote speech which highlighted the strong partnership between Fiji and Australia. This speech was important for understanding the way the Australian High Commission and DFAT are committed to collaborating with Fiji to improve the health needs of all children in Fiji. It also helped expand the awareness and reach of CAH.

PAEDIATRIC DOCTOR'S ADDRESS



Dr Emily Vadiga delivering her educational talk

Following the chief guest's address, it was time for the educational aspect of the day. This was delivered by paediatric doctor, Dr Emily Vadiga. Dr Emily's speech focused on addressing common questions asked by families of children with CAH and helped many guests who had previous little knowledge of CAH gain a better understanding. This speech was important for families to be able to understand the condition of their child as well as help bring awareness to the wider community to better understand how this condition is affecting the lives of children in Fiji.

PARENT TESTIMONY



Father, Isimeli Caglia during his testimony

Time was made for a father of two children living with CAH to come forward and share his and his family's experiences. This was an incredibly moving and inspirational aspect of the day. During his speech, he highlighted areas that he and his family struggled with following his children's diagnosis as well as shared insight into how their lives have improved since their family's experience with CAH. He made the audience aware of the external judgment that comes with a diagnosis and the stigma amongst the community. However, he also shared wisdom about how best to take advice from community members which can be beneficial for a family.

Whilst the parent testimony highlighted the difficulties of living with CAH it was also incredibly moving for the way he also described the ways CAH had brought positives into their lives. This included his other child being inspired to become a doctor to help his sister as well as the way experience treating CAH had brought employment opportunities for his wife. To hear from a parent who has been directly affected by this condition was incredibly impactful for all guests in attendance. It allowed families living with CAH to feel heard and understood and it also allowed for hospital staff and other guests to better understand the personal impact living with a chronic condition has on not only the child but the family as well.

CWMH'S PARTNER'S ADDRESS



Mr Pravneil Chand (FHO) delivers his address

It was then time for representatives from CWMH's partner institutions Frank Hilton and Tamavua Rehabilitation Hospital to make an address. First was Mr Pravneil Chand from the Frank Hilton Organisation which is a dedicated organisation that provides essential services to children in the community living with a wide range of disabilities and chronic conditions. Hearing from Frank Hilton Organisation (FHO) was important as Mr Pravneil's message was to reinforce the importance of early intervention and to make families and the community aware of the services Frank Hilton makes available for the community.



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

The address from Tamavua representative, Srtitika Kumar echoed a similar message of the importance of changing mindsets to acknowledge the importance of children's care and rehabilitation. Srtitika also made guests aware of the new National Disability Inclusive Health and Rehabilitation Action Plan recently launched by the Fijian government which aims to boost rehabilitative services in Fiji.

CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS



CAH patient and his grandmother enjoying the celebrations

This event was highly successful in bringing families together which was noted as an area of importance by almost all families during CWMH's Hospital in the Home (HITH) program. HITH has allowed increased contact between hospital staff and patients and has meant patient concerns can be heard and addressed. The need to celebrate NCDs and CAH specifically was recognised as this has been an area previously overlooked when bringing awareness to other conditions and NCDs such as type 1 diabetes and RHD.



CAH patient and mother enjoying the celebrations

CLAN are honoured to have been able to support the paediatric department at CWMH in preparing for this event. CLAN provided many resource materials to help increase the education and understanding of CAH which were provided to families and guests on the day. This included the development of a simple brochure that provides clear information on CAH and the appropriate action to take when a child with CAH is sick. Flip Charts were also printed in hopes of being introduced to clinical settings. CLAN's support also meant that the families and chief guests could each wear a specially ordered t-shirt proudly displaying Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia which allowed families to be recognised and supported and they also served as a souvenir for the day.



CLAN intern Asha Hamilton, CAH families, Stritika Kumar and Fleur Calcutt, cutting the cake

The day was able to run so successfully due to the collaboration between CLAN the Ministry of Health, Dr Ilisapeci Tuibeqa, the paediatric doctors and particularly the nursing staff of the children's outpatient clinic who were able to bring their passions together to ensure the day could be celebrated to the best of its ability