



# PRESS STATEMENT

IMR18/12

PNG MEDICAL SYMPOSIUM 20125 September 2012

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## HIV: EARLY DIAGNOSIS SAVES LIVES

Early diagnosis is the key to a healthy life for HIV positive people. The earlier you know you have the condition, the sooner you can start antiretroviral treatment (ART) and build your strength before the onset of AIDS-related illnesses.

“PNG’s HIV management guidelines say ART should begin when a person’s CD4 cell count falls below 350,” said Pamela Toliman, a scientific officer with the IMR Sexual and Reproductive Health Unit in Goroka. A CD4 count is a measure of how strong the immune system is.

“However, little is known about the health profiles of HIV positive people in PNG, particularly those who are newly diagnosed and yet to start on ART,” Ms Toliman said.

“Respiratory infections are a common cause of death among HIV positive people. In 2010-11, we targeted two public hospitals with high HIV caseloads -- Goroka General Hospital and Port Moresby General Hospital, inviting HIV positive people with respiratory disease to join our study.

“Ninety-three participants provided sputum and blood samples for analysis and we asked standard questions about their health, background and daily life.

“We found that those in Goroka were more likely to have a lower CD4 cell count than those in Port Moresby. Significantly more participants were immunologically eligible for ART in Goroka (65.5%) than in Port Moresby (34.5%).

“A large proportion of participants were diagnosed late in HIV disease and therefore could not reap the full benefits of early commencement on ART.

“We must investigate further the barriers preventing early diagnosis to improve health outcomes for HIV positive people,” Ms Toliman said.

**Symposium Paper:** Diagnosis and Early Commencement of Antiretroviral Therapy is Hampered by the Late Presentation of HIV-Positive People in Papua New Guinea.

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