



# PRESS STATEMENT

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## HIV: TESTING VIRAL LOADS IN PNG'S HIGHLANDS

Sixty per cent of HIV cases found in the Pacific region occur in Papua New Guinea, yet little is known about the health of PNG people living with the condition.

To manage HIV effectively, clinicians must know the patient's plasma viral load – the amount of HIV virus in the blood. This is essential for the state-of-the-art Antiretroviral Treatment (ART) that is increasingly available in developing countries.

Diana Timbi is working on an IMR study to determine the viral load and HIV subtype of people taking part in a HIV Drug Resistance Study in two highlands provinces of PNG. Ms Timbi is working with IMR in Goroka as part of her University of PNG Honours program.

“The higher the level of HIV virus in the blood, the faster it destroys the immune cells that fight infection and the greater the risk of developing HIV related illnesses in the next few years,” Ms Timbi said.

“Doctors report viral load as a number which represents the number of 'copies' of HIV virus in the blood per millilitre. Viral load is an essential indicator of whether a treatment is working effectively against HIV or not,” she said.

“Our study will provide the first viral load data for HIV positive people in PNG. It will also provide information about HIV drug resistance in this country.

“As state-of-the-art Antiretroviral Treatment (ART) becomes available for HIV positive people in developing countries, this viral load data will ensure that those in PNG can live longer, healthier lives.

“It will also reduce the chance of HIV drugs becoming less effective,” she said.

**Symposium Paper:** HIV subtype distribution and viral load determination in a cohort of patients in the highlands of Papua New Guinea.

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