

## **PPHSN EpiNet Workshop III Feedback from Dr Siale 'Akau'ola**

In general, I believe that the workshop was a success. The recommendations made accurately reflected the different strategies formulated by the participants. The participatory approach utilised during the workshop definitely encouraged open dialogue between the participants.

Two important items highlighted during the workshop were the needs for better communication and planning in a co-operative manner. Clearly, in a Pacific region comprised of small island nations with limited resources, the burdens associated with living in isolation and obscurity can be much easier to overcome when nations communicate, plan and pool their resources.

The principles behind Infectious Disease Surveillance, to me, are classic examples of the kind of communication and planning activities that one should apply to most situations in life and not only to infectious diseases. One can go further and say that medicine without disease surveillance could be likened to an army without an intelligence service. Obviously, in such a situation, one is not expected to win the battle since everyone would be plagued with uncertainty, ignorance and a lot of worries. The late Sir Winston Churchill once said, 'Let our advanced worrying become advanced thinking and planning.'

The recent EpiNet Workshop III definitely provided Pacific Island health workers with a forum to come together and learn, think, plan and formulate effective strategies that can protect their people from the ravages of any future infectious disease outbreaks.

I believe that it is now time for all concerned Pacific Island health workers to take on the initiatives that have been launched by PPHSN, SPC and WHO, and start implementing the recommended strategies. After all, as the saying goes, 'practice makes perfect.' In other words, to win the battle against infectious diseases, we have to be committed to planning, communication and co-operation, and at the same time enjoy the challenges provided by the different activities that need to be implemented, to make it all a convincing win in the end.

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