

For immediate release

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PROFESSIONALS GATHER TO LEARN ABOUT NEGLECTED KILLER DISEASES

Health Professionals from across the nation will meet on Thursday to learn about the most recent developments in understanding and controlling one of Australia's increasing deadly infections in the *Fifth National Workshop on Strongyloidiasis*.

'Strongyloidiasis' is classified as a neglected tropical disease by the World Health Organisation, because although between 30 and 100 million people world wide have the disease, little has been done to control it.

Richard Trudgen, CEO of an Indigenous not-for-profit organization; Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Inc (ARDS), faces increasingly alarming statistics and explains that this disease is also hyper-endemic in Indigenous communities in the northern three-quarters of the continent. Typically one-third of the people in each community have Strongyloides.

"This infectious disease is diagnosable and curable. It is a third-world disease in a first-world country that we can get rid of. Nobody in Australia should have it" he proclaimed.

The disease is caused by tiny worms called *Strongyloides stercoralis* burrowing through the body. The worms are continually reproducing within the body. The immune system fights back and usually keeps the worm numbers down, but it is not able to eliminate them altogether; so the person remains infected for life unless given treatment to kill all the worms.

When worm numbers are low or moderate, the disease is chronic and usually shows itself as intermittent skin, lung and digestive system symptoms.

There are two conditions that precipitate severe disease: the first is suppression of the immune system, most frequently by steroid drugs; the second condition is secondary infection with bacteria that usually live in the gut but are carried throughout the body by the worms. Secondary infection often shows itself as pneumonia, septicaemia or meningitis. Severe disease is invariably fatal unless the underlying diagnosis of strongyloidiasis is made and the patient given appropriate treatment to kill the worms.

In Central Australia, a disease caused by a virus called HTLV-1 is present along with Strongyloides in Indigenous communities. These two diseases have a synergistic effect on each other, so people with both diseases become extremely ill.

Thursday 17 September's one day workshop is to discuss the affects and look for a way forward with a view of eliminating *Strongyloides stercoralis* from Australia.

Richard Trudgen concluded, "We already have the tools. All that is needed now is a concerted effort by National and State or Territory Health authorities to make Australia strongyloidiasis-free."

The Fifth National Workshop on Strongyloidiasis is being held at the Centre for Remote Health in Alice Springs on Thursday 17th September from 9am.

The workshop is sponsored by Anton Breinl Centre for Public Health and Tropical Medicine James Cook University, Australasian College of Tropical Medicine, Merck Sharpe and Dohme, the Centre for Remote Health, Alice Springs and Aboriginal Resource and Development Services.

To register or for more information go to: http://cms.jcu.edu.au/phtmrs/abc/JCUPRD_051368

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