

# POLIO IN PAKISTAN THEN AND NOW

What a difference three years can make to Rotary's polio eradication program in Pakistan.

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"Then" is 2014, the year of my first visit to Pakistan. Following a presentation to the New Zealand National Immunisation Conference and a subsequent article in the nursing press on Rotary's role in polio eradication, I was invited to present at a Rotary polio conference in Lahore for World Polio Day (October 24).

It was in Lahore that I experienced my "Rotary moment". I am of the first generation who grew up without the fear of polio; the vaccine having been discovered a few years before my birth. Meeting polio victims in their teens and 20s affected me profoundly, and angered me. This should not be happening in the 21st century!

Pakistan is one of only three countries that has never ended the spread of polio. It faces the usual challenges of reaching every child in a large, developing nation and, until 2012, polio case numbers had been falling steadily, driven by a huge army of polio "warriors" – otherwise known as Rotarians!

But, by early 2014, the polio eradication program was going backwards. The Taliban had control of areas in the northern part of Pakistan known as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). In 2011, the CIA used a fake hepatitis vaccine campaign to locate the whereabouts of Osama bin Laden. This caused the Taliban to believe that the vaccine programs were a conspiracy against Pakistan and, in 2012, they issued a *fatwa* (decree) demanding an end to polio vaccinations in FATA.

They incited fear and disseminated lies about the polio vaccine program; that the vaccine causes sterility in the children, it is "haram" or not kosher, and the vaccinators were spies for the West.

This caused anger in, and problems for, the polio advocates I met. How could they promote the polio vaccine in such an environment? Other factors were not



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helping: mismanagement and lack of commitment from the government, polio workers waiting months to be paid, and the abhorrent killing of local vaccinators.

"Now" was October 2017, when I revisited Pakistan – and the progress was stunning! The government prioritised the Polio Eradication Initiative in 2014, after Pakistan's polio cases spiralled to 306 the previous year. A military operation to clean up security-compromised regions enabled vaccine delivery to resume, and the program was better managed. Local Rotarians like Aziz Memon (National Polio Chair,

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Pakistan) engaged with religious scholars and community leaders through workshops, meetings and seminars, to reduce vaccine myths and refusals. All this is reflected in the number of polio cases, which has fallen from 306 in 2013 to 22 in 2017.

To memorialise the local vaccinators who lost their lives, Rotary has launched a series of *PolioPlus* Memorial Scholarships. (For an example of how this has enabled one young medical student, see *Rotary Voices*.)

There is no doubt that polio will be eradicated, however, this progress should not deflect Rotarians from the challenge we still face. Getting from 99.8 per cent to 100 per cent eradication is the most expensive part of the campaign. The costs are high, but the cost of failure is even higher.

Rotary made a promise to the children of the world that we would ensure they live their lives free from the fear of polio. We must give *PolioPlus* a final push to keep that promise.

In eradicating polio, Rotary will leave two legacies: a polio-free world, and an amazing health infrastructure through which future programs can be delivered to every child on the planet.

I would like to acknowledge Alina A Visram, manager of the Pakistan National *PolioPlus* Committee, for her assistance in writing this article.

We might as well start the New Year off in style and deal with one of the more colourful reports in the system. The Club Fundraising Analysis talks about how we've progressed in the area of fundraising, but it also deals with membership numbers, fundraising goals, per capita performance and a whole host of other useful bits of information.

Access to this report is through the normal manner. Go to My Rotary/Rotary Foundation/Foundation Reports/View Reports/Club Reports then click on Club Fundraising Analysis.

The first set of figures gives you a five-year history of the Foundation Goals the club has set for fundraising. This will allow you to track progress (or lack of progress) and gives you a good idea of just where you've been and where you are going. Next to that you'll see a five-year history of contributions to the Annual Fund – but remember that the 2017-18 figure is year to date (YTD), while the rest are for complete years. Moving across to the right, you then have Total TRF Contributions, which includes grants, polio and Endowment Fund. Again, the 2017-18 figure is YTD.

The big graph in the middle simply explains goals, annual fund for previous years, and an annual fund comparison on a YTD basis in graphic form (this will be based on the month you selected when running the report).

Over on the righthand side, you have per capita giving history, and this gives you a chance to see how you've done and how you are currently doing against the district performance. Don't forget the 2017-18 figures are YTD, but the rest are for the full year.

Then we have a five-year membership history, and down below that you've got history on EREY (that's those members who've given something during the year); sustaining members (those that have given at least \$US100 a year); and PHS eligible or those that have given at least \$US1000 a year.

This is a ripper of a report that gives you a good overview of where you've been and where you are now. Go ahead! Take the plunge and run the report. You'll have lots of fun playing around with the numbers.



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