

ADDRESS BY
HIS HONOUR MR TOM PAULING QC
ADMINISTRATOR OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY
ON THE OCCASION OF
**INAUGURAL PRESENTATION OF ADMINISTRATOR'S
MEDALS IN PRIMARY HEALTH CARE**

Government House, Darwin

2 May 2008

One of my very first appointments as Administrator of the Northern Territory was a tour of the Menzies School of Health Research. It was a highly educational visit to what is the only Australian health and medical research institute with a primary focus on the health of Indigenous communities and people living in tropical, remote areas.

The challenges are immense: long term effects of substance abuse, high incidence of chronic diseases and heart disease, too many cases of rheumatic fever, difficulties in diagnosing symptoms for illnesses such as melioidosis, and indeed difficulties in retaining the GPs. Are we still going to be listing the same lamentable situation in ten, twenty, fifty years time?

To properly understand the implications of good provision of primary health care I referred to excerpts from the World Health Organization's definition: *It is essential health care be made accessible at a cost the country and community can afford with methods that are practical, scientifically sound and socially acceptable. Everyone in the community should have access to it, and everyone should be involved in it... ..*

... it should also include at least education of the community on prevalent health problems and methods of preventing them, promotion of proper nutrition, safe water and sanitation."

Over the years I've noted a commonality between our situation and that of Canada, especially risk factors affecting aboriginal peoples, and The Public Health Agency of Canada takes the World Health Organization's definition further:

The determinants of health can be grouped into seven broad categories: socio-economic environment; physical environments; early childhood development; personal health practices; individual capacity and coping skills; biology and genetic endowment; and health services.

The scale of the primary health care required here in the Northern Territory is as vast as the Territory itself and demands flexible responses and wholehearted commitment. It is the people of our communities that concern me – patients who may feel panicked and confused, the health practitioners themselves who can suffer stress and overload. The inequities are evident and the health disparities at times tragic, yet the practitioners are incredibly dedicated.

I am acutely aware of the tasks that we face in the Northern Territory and that is why I am glad that I can recognise this dedication through the award of Administrator's Medals to a deserving individual and to an organisation who are both deeply involved with the provision of health care to our communities.

This is the first such opportunity to affirm the value of our primary care workers, the quiet achievers of the health system. I thank them for their endeavours over the past years and I extend that thanks to all of you here today for the efforts you make to extend meaningful primary health care.