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[Media Center](#) > [Speeches](#) > HON. MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND MEDICAL SERVICES JONE USAMATE SPEECH AT THE LAUNCH OF RESEARCH ON “THE



HON. MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND MEDICAL SERVICES JONE USAMATE SPEECH AT THE LAUNCH OF RESEARCH ON “THE RISK FOR LOWER LIMB AMPUTATION AMONGST DIABETICS”

8/29/2015

Community Leaders,
FRIEND Board Members,
Director, Associate Director,
Staff and all present this morning,
Good Morning and

Diabetes is the one Non Communicable Disease that has created a lot of inequities especially with the way health resources are utilised in Fiji. I have no doubt that the big complications of kidney failure, cardiovascular events like stroke and heart attacks and lower limb amputations have hugely impacted the country's productivity and therefore the sustainability of any development project or plan.

Out of the major complications mentioned, Diabetic lower limb infections and amputations is a major contributing factor to the high cost of health care today and creating more burdens on families, communities and the nation.

The lower limb amputation rate of 1 in every 12.5 hours is a statistic we are not proud to speak about, but it is a reality we are facing and knowing that it will get worse if nothing is done to address this, is not a comfortable thought to have.

This is a challenge that needs the collaboration of anyone who cares about the wellbeing of a fellow Fijian whether they are young or old, iTaukei or of another ethnicity and whatever gender /belief lines or occupation they belong to – because Diabetes is a condition that does not discriminate in the way it affects people – so everyone’s input is needed.

In order to achieve positive outcomes and targets on any part of our National Strategies on NCDs, an integrated approach is needed at all healthcare stages; primary care, secondary care and tertiary care.

Before we embark on the quest to eliminate or significantly reduce this embarrassing and outrageous statistic, we must be able to know where we are and how we are going to continuously measure ourselves to the targets we have set out to meet. We can only do this through relevant and contextualised research work and ones that will have applicable results.

Research is therefore a fundamental need at all healthcare stages and it is encouraging to know that the research work that I am going to launch today “The Risk for Lower Limb Amputation Amongst Diabetics “is all these and more.

The initiative taken by the Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises & Development (FRIEND) to be the lead in this specialised work has to be commended and my Ministry is ready to fully utilise and provide the necessary support to this partnership to ensure that all Diabetics in this country will one way or another benefit from its outcomes. Having a surgeon like Dr Jone Hawea on to lead the project who not only understands the intricacies of the problem but is passionate and determined on doing something about it, is an added bonus and rightful justification to a full support by my Ministry. I am fully aware of the good work that FRIEND has done for the past 13 years integrating social, economic and health in development and running a holistic health program for 5 years now even in the face of financial support challenges amongst other difficulties common to interested health stakeholders other than MOH in this country.

It is indeed a pleasure therefore to be here, in this organic & healthy environment and celebrate FRIEND’s 13th Birthday.

I am sure that they will have an innovative and stylish perspective to today’s celebrations but as we are about to partake in it, I would like to pose a challenge to everyone present here today. FRIEND has taken the initiative to do something about the NCD crisis. What about you and I as family members, community members, NGO’s, corporate bodies?

We often think that bad things will not happen to me, it’s the other who suffer but if each one of us looks at our lifestyle habits and observe what we are consuming and how we live our daily lives you will know best how far you are from this disease. What can you do for you and your family, simple changes that could save them from disease and disability?

I am aware that FRIEND has banned instant noodles, fizzy drinks, tinned meat from all its events and from its premises. I’m sure it was not an easy decision because many of us depend on these things

and it's hard to think about food without these items but leadership has taken a stand to ensure their staffs are healthy. Can we do the same as heads of families and heads of organisations? Banning processed foods? Our traditional foods did not make our fore fathers sick; it's the new processed very well marketed foods. Traditionally our fore fathers used Qai and coconut to sweeten their dishes. Traditional unprocessed foods are far superior and give us health and life.

Our women, our mothers are nurturers of the families, I know they can fight for the lives of their children and go to any length to do that...it's in your hands to take daily decisions that could save your family's health, if you have the will power its easy, we can replace the excessive use of white flour with flour made from local root crops, dry fruits at home to use as snack food for children, there are many healthy alternatives around displayed here today, I'm sure with commitment we can all help reverse the figures. The question is also how are we treating the diabetics at home, are they eating normal food or are we cooking for them foods that will prolong their quality of life ?we at Minister recommend foods for each person on foods are best, is the family supportive to help diabetics have a quality of life?

This research will also provide with us a window to see once each diabetic is assessed what interventions prolong the quality of life? We at the Ministry are thankful that FRIEND has taken this step and we are looking forward to learning from the results.

I would now launch the research and I'm told I will be the first patient to undergo the examination. I invite each one of the diabetics and every family or friend you know that may have diabetes to come forward to the clinics and get yourself checked.

END. Diabetes is the one Non Communicable Disease that has created a lot of inequities especially with the way health resources are utilised in Fiji.