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Launch of new e-learning modules to target world's highest rate of rheumatic heart disease

RHDAustralia will launch 15 new 'clinician e-learning modules' tomorrow night at a seminar in Darwin as part of Australia's *Rheumatic Fever Strategy* to tackle the world's highest recorded rate of acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease.

Acute rheumatic fever is a significant cause of disease among Indigenous children, often leading to rheumatic heart disease, a chronic heart condition in which the heart valves are damaged, which can lead to heart failure, stroke and premature death.

Developed by rheumatic heart disease experts from around Australia, the modules are designed for clinicians and senior health staff to improve the prevention, control and management of acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease.

Professor Bart Currie, Director of RHDAustralia said the first module builds clinicians' basic knowledge, then the content covers 14 specialised areas including rheumatic heart disease in pregnancy, medical management of mitral valve disease, medical management of aortic valve disease and rheumatic heart disease and dental care.

Professor Currie said, 'Clinicians can choose to do as many modules as they need to meet their learning objectives'.

Each module has been developed by the clinical champion in that field, trialed with several doctors, and provides best-practice information.

RHDAustralia's new 'clinician modules' expand its efforts from the 'health worker modules' launched in 2012, to educate the health workforce of best practice approaches to the prevention, diagnosis and management of acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease.

Professor Currie said, 'We encourage health organisations to include the modules on their learning management systems'.

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Background information

Rheumatic heart disease is caused by one or more episodes of acute rheumatic fever. These repeated episodes damage heart valves so they no longer function adequately, leading to heart failure and sometimes the need for cardiac surgery, or death. Acute rheumatic fever is caused by the body's autoimmune response to an infection with the bacterium group A streptococcus, and is commonly seen in



children from Indigenous communities across northern Australia. Acute rheumatic fever occurs mainly in children aged between five and 14 years old, and affects a number of areas of the body, including the joints, brain and heart.

About RHD Australia

RHDAustralia is the National Coordination Unit for rheumatic heart disease and aims to reduce death and disability from acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease. Funded by the Australian Government's Department of Health, RHD Australia is based at Menzies School of Health Research in Darwin. The unit was established in 2009 as part of the *National Rheumatic Fever Strategy*.