

## WORLD TB DAY ON 24 MARCH 2010

**World TB Day is held on Wednesday, 24 March** aiming to raise awareness and build support for the fight against tuberculosis (TB). Although TB has been curable for more than 60 years, there are still 9 million new cases and 1.6 million deaths from this infectious lung disease each year.

World TB Day commemorates the day in 1882, when Prof Robert Koch of Germany identified the *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* as the cause of the disease known in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the “White Plague” because of its devastating effects. The annual event helps bring fresh attention to an age-old disease, which needs funding for new diagnostic tools, vaccines and drugs as well as to develop and maintain effective public health systems to provide prevention, treatment and control.

“It is easier to gain attention and resources for new diseases, such as swine flu, than for ongoing problems like tuberculosis,” said Professor Norbert Berend, Research Director at the Woolcock Institute of Medical Research. “But it’s critical not to underestimate TB. With the increase in multidrug-resistant TB to more than 500,000 cases last year, the potential for TB to become a public health emergency is very real.”

Professor Guy Marks, Research Leader of the Epidemiology Group at the Woolcock Institute of Medical Research and is a thoracic physician is currently working on a tuberculosis project in Vietnam.

This new project will evaluate targeted active case finding as a strategy for TB control in Vietnam. Currently Vietnam does not do any screening or active case finding for TB, relying instead on patients with symptoms of TB presenting to health facilities. However incident rates remain high and a recent prevalence survey found many patients with TB who had no symptoms. Guy believes there is a need for more use of targeted x-ray screening to finding cases.

Dr Greg Fox, a PhD student who is working with Guy Marks on the project will be based in Vietnam for the next two years. At the same time, Greg is also teaching English to doctors as a part of the Hoc Mai programme - which is a collaboration between Sydney Medical School and Hanoi Medical University.

The mission of the Woolcock Institute is to raise awareness for Lung health. As a member of the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS), The Woolcock Institute is also one of the sponsors of the **2010 Year of the Lung** campaign.

The **Year of the Lung** was launched to build awareness of the essential role the lungs play in health and the toll taken by lung diseases such as pneumonia, asthma, lung cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder, as well as tuberculosis. “The average person is far more aware of the dangers of heart disease and the role of the heart in maintaining health than of the lungs,” said Professor Berend, who is also a member of FIRS. “Our goal is to change that perception and make lung health a global priority”.

*For more information:*

Woolcock Institute Website: [www.woolcock.org.au](http://www.woolcock.org.au)

World TB Day: [www.stoptb.org/events/world\\_tb\\_day/2010/](http://www.stoptb.org/events/world_tb_day/2010/)

Year of the Lung: [www.yearofthelung.org](http://www.yearofthelung.org)