

Research Institute for Tropical Medicine: Now and Beyond Year 2000

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For more than 17 years now, numerous breakthroughs have been achieved in the control of infectious tropical diseases. The Philippine Research Institute for Tropical Medicine or RITM is credited as one of the forerunners in this area of study.

The Research Institute for Tropical Medicine was inaugurated on April 23, 1981. It functions as the main research arm of the Department of Health and is mandated to implement the national health research program for infectious and tropical diseases.

The Institute is the fulfillment of negotiations between the governments of the Philippines and Japan. The building facilities and major laboratory and hospital equipment were donations through a grant by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The original building facilities included a laboratory wing and a 50-bed hospital for tertiary care of patients. In 1984, the physical plant was expanded to include another building for animal research and laboratory animal breeding. In 1989, further expansion of the facilities included a center for training in infectious and tropical disease.

RITM has earned a distinction for excellence in essential national health research in the Philippines. It plans and implements tropical medicine research programs that focus on deadly diseases particularly those that adversely affect the poor. These programs include: acute respiratory infections (ARI), diarrheal diseases, schistosomiasis, HIV-AIDS infection, malaria, viral hepatitis, leprosy, tuberculosis, rabies, dengue, poliomyelitis, and other infectious diseases.

The Research Institute for Tropical Medicine is now the center of infectious diseases training for doctors and paramedical staff from both government and private hospitals. It serves as the national reference center for HIV testing and dengue infection and the national reference laboratory for polio eradication program. It also functions as the coordinating center for antimicrobial resistance surveillance and the reference center for problematic infectious and tropical diseases.

The center has been a recipient of more than 50 prestigious research and training grants, majority of which were obtained through competitive and other funding mechanisms. Competitive research grants were obtained from WHO-TDR, US-NIH, Australian AID (AusAID), Government of Finland, European Union, IDRC, Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Japan Ministry of Health and the Philippine Council for Health Research and Development. Major training grant received from JICA support the Third Country Training Program for laboratory diagnosis of ARI, Diarrheal diseases and HIV/AIDS.