

Achieving a Polio-Free World Through Rotarians



This event titled: “End Polio Now” was hosted by the Orem Rotary and UVU Rotaract at the UVU Sorensen Center on Oct. 32rd, 2019. There were four different speakers that talked about the Rotary International (RI) organization, the origins and treatment of polio and how the Rotary International organization has been fighting to eradicate the disease. The handout distributed during the event, had a quote from singer-songwriter Angelique Kidjo that said, *“I am from a generation that has witnessed the devastating effects of polio. When I discovered how close we were to eradicating polio, I was very motivated to be a part of this movement. It is so rare when you can accomplish something spectacular.”* This caught my attention because the week before this event I had taken my one-year old son to get his vaccinations which included the polio vaccine.

The first speaker was Dr. Baldomero Lago, who is the CIO for UVU Global Engagement. He organizes and manages UVU’s global and intercultural academic initiatives and shared his personal experience about how polio has affected his life. His father in law suffered for many years from Polio. Dr. Lago urged the UVU students to get involved in the clubs and activities that the University offers. He shared that to have effective and lasting change, true community and government involvement is needed.



John Hanrahan speaking to the audience about the Rotary International Clubs involvement in the fight to eradicate polio.

The next speaker was John Hanrahan, the Utah Rotary District Governor. He gave an extensive background on how the Rotary International club has been involved in fighting and eradicating polio throughout the whole world. He informed us that Polio is spread by contact with food, water, saliva, etc.: in 1/200 cases it attacks the spine and in worse cases the victim dies unable to breathe or swallow. The first 'cure' was developed as a liquid that could be swallowed. This then no longer became a scientific problem but an economic one. John Hanrahan was passionate in stating that no child should have polio and if they do it was because of a lack of money/resources.

Several questions were asked by the audience like, ‘Why are there still cases of Polio in other countries?’ John gave an example of the Philippines who recently had its first case in 19 years. That is a ‘vaccine derived’ polio. What happens is that those who are vaccinated interact with those who haven’t been vaccinated and then the virus mutates and causes harm to those who haven’t been vaccinated. He went on to state the challenges Rotaract International has faced: reaching children in poor and rural areas, maintaining political commitment, securing financial resources, sustaining progress and keeping the vaccines cold in order to reach those in rural communities. Another question was asked about the difference between fighting the virus and eradicating it. John clearly stated that the virus is able to hibernate for three years. This means that the whole world would have to continue to vaccinate a minimum of three years after the time that there are 0 cases of polio reported.

There were two other speakers, Dr. Steve Anderson, the director of community and government relations at UVU and Dr. Dean Robinson the Orem Rotary club President designate who talked about how students can get involved in different programs and make a difference.

I was grateful to learn the history and the benefits of the polio vaccine that I had recently given to my own son and found this event to be enlightening.

Sariah Gomez, UVU student