

## Learning about Rotary International and Polio Eradication



I learned a lot while attending the World Polio Day commemoration event at Utah Valley University on October 23, 2019. Dr. John Hanrahan, President of the Utah Rotary was a keynote presenter, who spoke about polio eradication campaign worldwide by the Rotary International. I came into the event basically knowing nothing of polio. I learned that polio is a horrific disease and in serious cases can affect the spinal cord; making parts of the body unusable. Polio is contracted when someone comes into contact with feces. So, in areas with poor sanitation the virus easily spreads into the water supply by touch or by food consumption that has the virus. I also learned that there are three different types of polio and if I remember correctly there is only one type of the virus still infecting people.

In the 1940's and 1950's in the United States, there was a polio outbreak. People did not know the exact reasons for the disease, but parents did not want their kids in school, parks and swimming pools because of fear of the disease. There were even signs of people under 21 years of age that were not allowed to congregate in certain areas for their safety. Thankfully, there was a vaccine created shortly after the outbreak. The first vaccine was administered through a shot, but soon after that oral droplets were created which were vastly easier to administer to the public. These two vaccines have eliminated polio from most of the world and reduced the number of cases reported each year from an estimated 350,000 in 1988 to 33 in 2018.



***Dr. John Hanrahan, President of the Utah Rotary speaks about polio eradication campaign by the Rotary International***

Today, polio is close to being eliminated entirely. The countries with the most polio are Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria. These countries still have polio mainly from poor sanitation and movement between infected people. Movement of infected people is particularly high between the borders of Afghanistan and Pakistan because there are many nomadic tribes who cross the borders of the two countries daily. Another problem in these countries is reaching remote villages and communities all while keeping the vaccine liquid cold. If the vaccine reaches higher temperatures, it will not work even if it is administered correctly. Some villages thought that somehow somehow these vaccines will literally sterilize the community and that the humanitarian aid is somehow bad for them as a community. This is how isolated some of these tribes are in

Afghanistan and Pakistan. I would encourage anyone to look at the photos of people affected by polio, especially the children. All of whom are using random objects to use as a crutch or tool to help them move around in their day-to-day lives.

It is a shame that children today still contract polio. No child should ever have polio because of the physical and especially mental struggles that come with it. Children should be having fun; socializing with other kids, not worrying about diseases they could be possibly be picking up. The most amazing yet disappointing fact that I took away with me after the conference is how close humanity is to finally eradicating polio altogether.

I had an amazing time attending and contributing to the event, which was hosted by UVU Rotaract, student club, which is a branch of the Rotary International. I learned a lot and I felt that this conference made me much more aware of this disease and the effects of when it contacts directly with people. I also took away a much-appreciated look at life to be thankful that I was lucky enough to be born in a day and age where polio is not big concern in first world countries.

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