

World Polio Day at Utah Valley University



Dr. John Hanrahan, Rotary District Governor speaks about polio eradication campaign

Who knew there was not only a National day but a World Polio day? On October 10, 2019, Dr. Baldomero Lago, CIO of Global Engagement at Utah Valley University (UVU), Dr. John Hanrahan, Rotary District Governor, Dr. Steve Anderson, UVU Director of community and government relations, and Dean Robinson, President Elect of Orem Rotary spoke at UVU about that.

Dr. Lago briefly talked about past and present opportunities in relation to the United Nations and exciting things currently happening and that are in the works. Dr. Anderson also discussed opportunities and programs in association on the UVU campus (e.g. 150 clubs, study abroad, international and local internships, lectures and art/dance activities on campus) and Mr. Robinson provided background information on Rotary International. The keynote speaker, Mr.

Hanrahan, talked about Polio and the Rotary International initiative to eradicate the epidemic worldwide.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines Poliomyelitis (Polio) as “a highly infectious viral disease, which mainly affects young children. The virus is transmitted by person-to-person spread mainly through the faecal-oral route or, less frequently, by a common vehicle (e.g. contaminated water or food) and multiplies in the intestine, from where it can invade the nervous system and can cause paralysis.” During this presentation I learned that over sixty thousand people in America were diagnosed with Polio in the early 1950’s. They called it the “AIDS of the time.” Parents were unsure of how it passed so public pools and movie theaters were closed, and children were kept home.

In 1954 the first vaccine for polio was introduced. By the early 1970’s 61 countries had introduced and used the vaccine. In 1979 Polio was eradicated in the USA. At that point, Polio was no longer a “science” issue but a “political/economic issue.”

About 40 years ago, Rotary International made a goal that no child should suffer from a totally preventable disease and Polio should be eradicated worldwide. It took years of starting this initiative and millions of dollars, and eventually a Global Polio Eradication Initiative was formed with 16 other supporters. As of today, Polio is only an epidemic in 3 countries including: Nigeria, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

Mr. Hanrahan also touched on how we must continue the vaccines or within 10 years it could be as bad as the 1950’s. There is a vaccine derived strain of Polio, which means that it is in dormant in their vaccinated person, however, if someone is not vaccinated they can still get it. There are usually about 12 diagnosed incidences of this each year. The goal is eventually to have zero cases of Polio for the period of 5+ years and eradicate it from the whole world.

I am so grateful for the work that Rotary does for our community and for our world. This is truly a preventable disease and no child should suffer because of poverty, or inaccessibility of the vaccine. Most people know at least one person who was affected by Polio, my wish for the future is that my children and their children, will not know of this horrible disease or know of any child who has ever suffered from it.

Titus Elanyu, UVU student