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Media Release

05 September 2019

Canberrans amongst those recognised for their efforts during the West Africa Ebola Crisis

Sixty-six health professionals and supporting team were awarded the Humanitarian Overseas Service Medal by His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd), Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, at a ceremony held at Government House on Thursday, 05 September 2019. The medal is presented to those who perform humanitarian service in a foreign country, in particular those working in dangerous environments or during a humanitarian crisis.

The recipients included eight Canberrans, four of whom continue to live in the nation's capital and work at Aspen Medical - Project Director for West Africa Leo Cusack, HR Specialist Melissa Broers, Operations Manager Anna Mercieca and Finance Specialist Syed Shah.

"These Australians are outstanding – in a moment of real danger, a humanitarian crisis, they used their training and expertise to save lives," the Governor-General said.

"They are worthy recipients of the Humanitarian Overseas Service Medal and worthy of our thanks and recognition."

Glenn Keys AO, Chairman of Aspen Medical, said, "Our teams of expatriate and local African staff were instrumental in the global effort to stem the advance of the disease and leave a legacy of a trained local workforce, across many countries in North West Africa, to combat any further outbreaks. We have also developed a highly-trained team here in Australia and New Zealand with the capability to deploy at short notice in the event we are required again.

"It is a testament to the quality of the team, the processes that were put in place and the overall management of the project, that not one team member was infected despite the infection rate amongst healthcare professionals being as high as 20% in West Africa at that time."

The West African Ebola crisis started in Guinea in late 2013 and was declared as a public health emergency by the World Health Organization in August 2014 as it had spread rapidly to Sierra Leone and Liberia.

When the Ebola crisis emerged in late 2014 in Liberia, Aspen Medical worked with a US logistics company contracted by the US Government to provide clinical management services to four Ebola Treatment Units in some of the remotest areas of the country. This project was ongoing until August 2015.

At the same time, Aspen Medical was asked by the Australian Government to respond to the crisis in Sierra Leone. Funds for this deployment were also provided by the New Zealand Government. Aspen Medical provided all clinical and supporting services to an Ebola Treatment Centre at Hastings Airfield in Freetown. The centre opened in December 2014 during the worst stage of the crisis. The team successfully handed over the centre to the Sierra Leone Department of Health in June 2015. Aspen Medical then managed the Kerry Town treatment unit on behalf of the UK Government from July to December 2015.

By the time the emergency was declared over the following year, 28,616 cases had been reported with 11,310 deaths.

Aspen Medical has a long heritage responding to humanitarian crises and development needs across the Pacific, Africa and the world. Aspen Medical has responded to cholera outbreaks in Papua New Guinea, tsunami responses in the Solomon Islands, and been part of the malaria eradication program in the Pacific.

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