



# GWENDA ANGA- LESTER

Papua New Guinea/  
Solomon Islands

Dr. Gwenda Anga-Lester is a paediatrician with an interest in Paediatric Oncology from Manus Island, Papua New Guinea (PNG), and Malaita Province, Solomon Islands.

She graduated from the University of PNG in 2010 as a paediatrician. She has worked as a paediatrician doing general paediatrics and paediatric oncology at the Port Moresby General Hospital since 2010.

Dr. Gwenda Anga-Lester is the first paediatrician to specialise in paediatric oncology, providing leadership and advice to medical staff across PNG.

**"One day at a time;  
after all, today is  
the tomorrow  
you worried about  
yesterday"**

**Billy Graham**

## On Relationships that Influenced My Career

As a registrar, I worked with a senior Paediatrician Dr Mobumo Kiromat, who also had an interest in paediatric oncology; however, due to the fact that in PNG, infectious diseases remain the overwhelming cause for morbidity in children, it was difficult to focus only on paediatric cancers; So she encouraged me to take paediatrics and paediatric oncology up and develop a service for PNG children seeking cancer care.

My training in paediatric oncology was made possible with funding from the RE ROSS grant through an application by Prof. Trevor Duke who has been very supportive and instrumental in Paediatric training in PNG. With the support from this grant and the PNG National Department of Health, I was able to do a 1-year fellowship with the Children's Cancer Centre at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne, Australia. Returning home after this 1-year fellowship, with the help of Prof. Micheal Sullivan, Prof. Trevor Duke and the PMGH Hospital Management, we were able to set up the following:

- A separate 12 bed children's oncology ward which now receives paediatric patients from all over PNG for diagnosis and treatment
- Training for 2 nurses in safe chemotherapy
- Adapted cancer protocol for childhood cancers
- Collaborations with international colleagues (for example, SIOP-Oceania)
- Ongoing training for local registrars and nurses in childhood cancers
- Development of a cancer registry and palliative care service.

## On Challenges and Overcoming Them

My main challenges are advocating for childhood cancer against more pressing priorities, like infectious diseases, and against adult cancers, which have a higher incidence, and doing this in a resource-limited setting. Having a list of achievable

priorities and focusing on one achievable task at a time helps a lot.

My continued awareness-raising and advocacy with my immediate supervisors, the hospital management, and the Department of Health have resulted in gaining support for childhood cancer services. This would also not be achievable without having supportive mentors and colleagues.

Another challenge is the fact that about 80% of patients with paediatric cancers present late, thus curative treatment is not possible. This can be very discouraging when most patients who seek medical help pass away. However, when one of the many patients completes treatment and is doing well, this encourages the team to keep trying and working hard.

## On Balancing Career and Other Life Responsibilities

I can balance career and other life responsibilities to an extent by trying as much as possible to 'leave work at work'. I also have a very supportive and understanding husband and family (parents and my younger sister) who are always there to help me.

## My Words of Wisdom for the Next Generation of Female Leaders

Prioritize, focus, and always look for a positive in every situation!