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Aussie, Indonesia to co-develop AIDS, cancer drugs

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Singapore: Australia and Indonesia are jointly working towards the research to understand prevalence of AIDS and cancer in Indonesia, share knowledge to prevent the disease burden and utilize effective technology to develop drugs and related therapy. President of Australian Academy of Science Professor Suzanne Cory, who is currently on a visit to Indonesia, has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on scientific and academic cooperation with the country.

Professor Cory stressed on the importance of discoveries in medicine to impair natural cell death process as a critical step towards malignancy and effective cancer therapy, and possibilities of new class of drugs that could be effective in treatment of many types of cancer. "For the past 30 years, we have seen a revolution in our understanding of the genetic accidents that contribute to cancer development. Understanding cell death is the key to treating many types of cancer," said Professor Cory, during a lecture co-hosted by Australian Embassy in Jakarta, and the Indonesian, and Australian Academy of Sciences.

Australia is providing $25 million to help improve access to HIV services in Papua and West Papua, which have the highest rates of HIV in Indonesia, through Rapidly Expanding Access to Care for HIV (REACH) program. REACH will increase the number of people who get HIV care and treatment, and is part of the $100 million HIV partnership between Australia and Indonesia. The 8-year-long partnership was kickstarted in 2008 and will continue till 2016.

Australia, through its program AusAID, is raising public awareness in Indonesia about seriousness and prevention of AIDS. "Innovative approaches are needed to raise public awareness of HIV and AIDS to reduce stigma and discrimination, and also HIV transmission," said Ms Jacqui De Lacy, head of AusAID Indonesia.

"In the national interest, Australia needs to increase its level of global engagement in science and technology," Professor Cory said. "One way to do this is through regional collaboration," she added.

Earlier this year, Indonesia had launched oral rotavirus vaccine candidate, RV3, a new vaccine developed through Indonesia-Australia research collaboration to reduce the burden of diarrheal disease. RV3 was developed in partnership with Australia's Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) and Indonesia's Universitas Gadjah Mada.

Diarrhea is the leading cause of death in children under five years of age in Indonesia, and 35 to 84 percent of the cases

were found to be caused by rotavirus. RV3 is an effective and affordable vaccine, that can given orally to newborn babies, to provide the earliest possible protection.

Together with the Indonesian Ministry for Research and Technology, Australian Academy of Science, on behalf of the DIICCSRTE (Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education), has previously facilitated a number of bilateral events. These events included joint symposium on science and technology (2006); joint working group in science and innovation, research and technology (2007); workshop on human health including infectious diseases (2008), workshop on agriculture and food security (2009); and workshop on environmental science (2011).

Also, the Academy's Science by Doing team is assisting Indonesia to develop a pilot science curriculum unit for Indonesian secondary school students written in Bahasa Indonesia. If the pilot proves successful, it will be used as model for a full suite of units for Indonesia. The program is funded by the Australian government through AusAID and DIICCSRTE.