

WEEK 16 FOUNDATION MINUTE – THE PLUS IN POLIOPLUS

Many don't know what the 'Plus' is, in PolioPlus. The Plus indicates an addition to Polio immunization. Traditionally service projects by Rotary were predominantly in the fields of education and economic and social development, including water supply and sanitation. Some local humanitarian projects included medical screening camps, eye-camps for cataract surgery, orthopedic camps for corrective surgery of children with deformities due to polio etc. These were club or occasionally District-level projects, not global.

In 1978, Canadian Rotarians raised funds and applied for a Rotary Matching Grant for Madras in India for 78,000 doses of measles vaccine. That project was a game-changer. Over time, countries persuaded their populations to protect their children against measles, diphtheria, and other deadly diseases of childhood through vaccination. The first 3H polio immunization project was launched in the Philippines in 1979, along with tetanus vaccination of pregnant women, and thus immunization, especially of children, to prevent vaccine-preventable diseases — measles, polio and tetanus — became a Rotary priority.

By 1984, children protected from polio paralysis were still dying, though less frequently than earlier, of diphtheria, whooping cough, measles, as several other vaccine-preventable diseases. As part of the planning for Rotary's centenary celebrations, a decision was made that Rotary would announce a 'gift of a polio-free world' to the children. Moreover, since Rotarians did not want children protected from polio paralysis dying of diphtheria, measles or whooping cough, Rotary would support the administration of all vaccine-preventable diseases – the global Rotary Centenary Project was known as 'PolioPlus'. The Plus indicated Rotary's support for protecting children against all vaccine-preventable diseases.