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National Referral Hospital needs new sewage system: Dr. Harry

By Charles Hakwa
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Vila Central Hospital's current sewage system

Vila Central Hospital (VCH) needs a new sewage system.

The national referral hospital's sewage system is also polluting Ekasuvat or First Lagoon.

VCH Superintendent, Dr. Tony Harry said the sewage system is from the 1960s during colonial days and the system used is outdated. Dr. Harry says there are three processes that the system uses which are storage, filtration and finally chlorination, just like the swimming pools, before it goes into the lagoon.

Dr. Harry said because the system is outdated, there is a possibility of human waste residue bypassing the old filters and seeping into the lagoon. He said they cleaned out the residue dating back to the 1970s before independence last year.

He is appealing to the Ministry of Health to get the proposed project of a new sewage system up and running as soon as possible. Dr. Harry says the project may be funded by the Japanese government who funded the last hospital upgrades.

Next to the sewage facility is the Laken community made up of approximately 100 people from Tongoa. Chief Kalo Thompson who is part of this community said the pollution issue is a longtime ongoing problem.

The chief admits his people too may have been irresponsible at times in the past and littered the lagoon but said they have lived there for the past 20-30 years and have seen drastic changes.

Chief Thompson says apart from the hospital, business houses such as resorts along the lagoon should be inspected by authorities concerned to determine whether or not they are also contributing to pollution through their sewage system.

Chief Thompson says in the past, the sea was clear and one could see the kokias shells when diving. However, these days the water is so murky one can hardly see anything.

He mentioned the lagoon smells different as well and there are not as many fish as there were a few years ago when the people in his community made a sustainable income from selling fish.

Chief Thompson is interested in meeting with other chiefs from the communities along the lagoon to discuss this issue as he says the pollution levels also pose a health threat to the people, and if the chiefs stand together they can have their concerns heard by the authorities responsible.

While the VCH Superintendent sympathised with those affected by the pollution, he also explained that the land across the road from the VCH from Seaside Police down to the lagoon where the Laken community lives is hospital land and the Laken Community have put

themselves in danger by living on hospital land without a lease, next to a sewage facility which already poses a potential threat.

Dr. Harry added the houses at Seaside Police which are now occupied by police officers, used to accommodate doctors as they were built before independence by the Leprosy Foundation.