



Shutting the door on polio forever

KABUL, AFGHANISTAN - SEPTEMBER 26: Fawad Rahmani, 11, makes his way home using his crutches and special braces fitted from the ICRC Orthopedic clinic on September 26, 2009 in Kabul, Afghanistan. Fawad has had polio since he was two years old. Afghanistan is still fighting to eradicate polio to which they are one of the few countries still dealing with the disease. (Photo by Paula Bronstein/Getty Images)

By Mary Alys Cherry

IT'S BEEN MORE than three decades since the last polio case was reported in the United States.

For the most part, it has been erased from the world, yet it still lurks in three countries.

"We are tantalizingly close to ending polio," says Diana Schoberg, associate editor of the Rotary International magazine, explaining that "all the polio

cases in the world now stem from only three countries: Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

"If we can end polio in these three nations, we will shut the door on the disease forever."

Doing just that is a major goal of Rotary clubs around the world, Space Center Rotary President Scott Rainey is quick to explain. To Rotary, which has been fighting to eradicate polio all

over the world since 1979 through its PolioPlus program, polio eradication is not an option, it's an obligation. All Rotarians annually make donations to the PolioPlus program and solicit donations from businesses, churches and families around the globe.

Nigeria is the closest endemic country to stopping polio. Near the end of 2014, it had only recorded five cases all year, compared with 42 the

previous year. But violence in northern Nigeria -- where the Boko Haram militants have killed thousands, including polio vaccinators, and kidnapped 200 school girls -- threatens to impede the nation's progress.

In Pakistan, more than half of its cases are in a Taliban-controlled area where militants banned all health workers in 2012, "resulting in an explosion of cases. . . from 58 in 2012 when eradication appeared within reach to 93 in 2013 and more than 100 by August 2014," Rotary said. However, the Pakistani military launched a huge operation to flush out the Taliban and have since been able to vaccinate 350,000 children they were previously unable to reach.

Afghanistan has only reported one case of polio endemic to that country in the past 18 months with several reported this year -- at least eight -- genetically related to polio in Pakistan. The Afghan Taliban have cooperated with Rotary and its partners to eradicate polio and guaranteed safe passage to vaccination teams, resulting in a drop from 37 cases in 2012 to 14 in 2013 to almost zero this past year.

All in all, the world total is down to slightly more than a hundred -- a far cry from 1952's terrible outbreak when 58,000 cases were reported, leaving 3,145 dead and 21,269 paralyzed, or in 1977 when it was reported that 254,000 U.S. residents had been paralyzed by polio. At its peak in the 1940s and 1950s, polio would paralyze or kill over half a million people worldwide every year.

Until vaccines were developed and introduced by first Jonas Salk in 1955 and then Albert Sabin in 1957, polio was the world's most feared disease.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt, totally and permanently paralyzed from the waist down after being stricken in 1921, tried a wide range of therapies, including hydrotherapy in Warm Springs, Ga. In 1938, he helped found the March of Dimes that funded the development of those polio vaccines.

The March of Dimes changed the way it approached fund-raising. Rather than soliciting large contributions from a few wealthy individuals, it sought small donations from millions of individuals. Its hugely successful fund-raising campaigns collected hundreds of millions of dollars -- more than all of the U.S. charities at the time combined (with the exception of the Red Cross).

By 1955, the March of Dimes reportedly had spent \$25.5 million in research, funding the development of both vaccines, the vaccine field trials and supplies of free vaccine for thousands of children. **BP**

Seven decades later, she's still dealing with dreaded disease

By Mary Alys Cherry

HALF A MILLION PEOPLE around the world have known the ravages of polio

-- including Lynn Rice of Manvel. She's spent most of her life dealing with it and took members of Space Center Rotary in Clear Lake on her life's journey during a recent club meeting.

She became a victim April 24, 1944 when she was a 10-year-old fifth grader living in Avon Park, Fla., and suddenly lost the use of her legs. Fortunately, her family was able to get her to Warm Springs, Ga., to the polio treatment center set up by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, also a polio victim, and partially funded by the March of Dimes.

She spent eight months receiving therapy at Warm Springs before returning home and continued treatment under the watchful eye of its doctors for a number of years, including surgery on her leg and foot to correct wayward muscles and help her walk correctly, and wearing a special jacket and a special corset to alleviate back and stomach muscle problems.

While her days were not always easy, she was able to have a half-way normal life.

By the time she graduated from high school, she was able to walk quite well and as



Lynn Rice

valedictorian lead her class in for the commencement exercises. She went on to earn a degree in music education at Florida State University, and become an elementary school music teacher.

But that's not the end of the story. She married a college professor, Dr. Joe Rice, who taught at the University of Houston and Houston Baptist University, had children and grandchildren.

After a somewhat normal life, polio has reared its ugly head again. She has developed Post-Polio Syndrome, which affects her legs and ability to walk normally and has been undergoing treatment at Memorial Hermann Texas Institute for Research and Rehabilitation (TIRR). She walks with a cane and a rolling walker to get around. She also has a scooter for shopping days.

"Don't try to keep up with me and my red scooter when I'm shopping at a giant store such as Macy's or Dillard's or Target!" she laughs.

She's also quite thankful the terrible disease has just about been eradicated from the world.