

**Regional Tourism and Health launch and Partnership Meeting, Aruba, May 2, 2014**  
**MINISTER'S MAGINLEY KEYNOTE ADDRESS NOTES**

Hon Dr Rufus Ewing, Premier of Turks and Caicos Islands

Hon John Maginley, Minister of Tourism, Antigua and Barbuda

Hon Dr Alex Schwengle, Minister of Health, Aruba

Hon Otmar Odouber, Minister of Tourism, Aruba

Ms Gail Henry, Caribbean Tourism Organisation

Members of the CARPHA team

Our Hosts in Aruba

Chief Medical Officers of the Caribbean

Ladies and Gentlemen, members of the media

It is a pleasure and honor to be here today at the invitation of CARPHA and CTO to deliver the keynote address at the launch of the regional tourism and health program. This has been a long standing passion of mine and I am very pleased today to be part of this launch. I do not want to go into the technical aspects of the program, but today I want to tell you the "Why"

My interest in this issues of Health affecting Tourism all started in the early 90s, long before I became involved in politics, when I was working in the hotel industry. One day I got a call from a high end hotel in Antigua. The hotel was faced with the challenge of dealing with an estranged wife who filed a lawsuit against the hotel because her husband was filing for divorce. The claim was that her husband became impotent after getting fish poisoning at the hotel and could no longer perform his marital responsibilities!!! The hotel had no protocol in place to counter.

Then during my tenure as Minister of Health, Antigua and Barbuda, 2004-2009, I had to deal with several health challenges which highlighted the importance of food-borne outbreaks and other diseases affecting our people and visitors. For example:

- **Alleged Dengue in Antigua** – I received a call from one of our top revenue earners that Visitors were cancelling reservations because they were went online and saw a report entitled “Dengue in Antigua”. However, the article was about a study of dengue and there was NO dengue in Antigua ( & I called Dr Indar at CAREC to verify).....BUT this highlighted how incorrect headlines/info can negatively affect tourism
- **Attack of Rice**.....over 100 persons with food borne illness from rice...Technicians wanted the hotel closed!
- **CAREC and CAREC Council Discussions** with then Director , Dr Campione, urging him of the importance of foodborne diseases program for protecting our people and tourism (as they threatened to close this program)
- **PAHO:** As the president of the Executive Committee of PAHO Council for the Health Minsters, I ensured that the importance of a foodborne diseases program was highlighted, given the Caribbean’s dependence on tourism and the impact of food-borne diseases in the sector.

When I became the Minister of Tourism in 2009, several challenges made it become even clearer and evident to me that Issues affecting Health and Tourism had to be addressed in an integrated collaborative manner if we wanted to achieve a profitable and sustainable tourism industry in the region.

As Chairman of the Council of Ministers of CTO in 2009 my first meeting brought this to the forefront!!!!

- **H1N1**.....( How would you define quarantine??) . A cruise ship was allowed to dock in Barbados, was refused entry by the Ministry of Health in St Lucia and Antigua, and then docked in the USVI with the same Health issues reported by the ship. There was NO clear local or regional protocol on how to deal with this situation. MOH and MOT or whichever department was responsible for the Cruise industry did not even have a conversation about the refusal of the ship. WHAT WAS THE ECONOMIC COST OF THIS? WHAT WAS THE HEALTH RISKS?  
I initiated a meeting with the Florida Caribbean Cruise Association to discuss how we deal with situations like this, to ensure that the cruise ships can come in , but at the same time, do not introduce or spread disease. Dr Indar met with principles of the FCCA to discuss these issues.
- **CTO Council of Ministers, Nov 2009.** As chairman of the CTO, I officially tabled my recommendations for a regional tourism and health program, since I was now fully convinced that foodborne illness and other health problems were directly impacting on

tourism , and there was the need for training, standards, clear regional protocols to protect the industry.

- **Spice island; chicken pox @ Sir Royston's hotel**

- **Turks and Caicos 2011, outbreak of Norovirus:** The owner of the hotel asked me for help because people were getting sick by the hundreds. I called Dr Indar @ CAREC because it was the first time I was hearing about this virus illness; which I now know can spread not only from person to person, but through the surroundings, and the air and that deep disinfection was needed to get rid of it. At the request of the hotel, I went to assist.

Here I discovered that there was no protocols for dealing with this illness , nor any sort of hotel surveillance to deal with problems like this safely- not by CAREC, CHTA, nor at the country, nor any other country in the region. One hotel was closed for a week losing an estimated 17 million dollars. The news was widespread on the internet, resulting in negative publicity. This could have happened to any one of us. Can our tourism industry survive this? If this was a stand-alone property it would most likely have been forced to close permanently.

**5. I want to commend Dr. Hospedales and his team (particularly Dr Indar) at CARPHA** for the wisdom and determination to get the tourism and health program at CARPHA initiated in 2014. When CARPHA stated that this program was starting I immediately endorsed it and invested the seed funding to show Antigua and Barbuda's commitment to it.

**In closing: I strongly believe that the regional Tourism and Health program will change the way we see and move forward with Tourism in our region while protecting our citizens. It will also create a new Brand awareness especially for all the smaller properties that really need our help in creating an identity for themselves that is recognizable.**

**Negative Health events can cripple our tourism industry and tourism dependent economies, if we do not address it now, in a regional, collaborative and intersectoral manner- which is what the regional tourism and health program will do.**

IT THUS GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE TO OFFICIALLY LAUNCH CARPHA/CTO'S REGIONAL TOURISM AND HEALTH PROGRAM TODAY. To demonstrate Antigua and Barbuda's full commitment and support for this program we would like to match our initial seed funding with a pledge of another US\$50,000 for this program. I urge you Premier, fellow Ministers and CMOs to follow, so that we can ensure that tourism (our bread and butter) is more sustainable and profitable and our image and reputation in the global market is strong and our countries are kept safe for all.