

PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

MEDIA RELEASE

Embargoed until 10pm, Thursday 23 September

Husband and wife team named joint Public Health Champions

The pioneering researchers, Robert Beaglehole and Ruth Bonita, have this evening been named joint Public Health Champions for 2010 at the Public Health Association's (PHA) annual conference at Turangawaewae Marae in Ngaruawahia.

Professors Beaglehole and Bonita are both Emeritus Professors at the University of Auckland and have each filled roles at the World Health Organization in Geneva: Ruth Bonita as Director of Noncommunicable Disease Surveillance, and Robert Beaglehole, as Director of the Department of Chronic Disease and Health Promotion.

The couple, who have been partners and colleagues for more than four decades, have authored, together and separately, a large number of scientific papers and books on public health. They are well known for a textbook *Basic Epidemiology*, which was co-authored with another New Zealand public health pioneer, Tord Kjellstrom. They champion ways to prevent illness and control chronic disease, especially in low and middle income countries where the burden is greatest.

PHA President Richard Egan paid tribute to Professors Beaglehole and Bonita, saying for forty years they have brought perspicacity, intellect, passion and dedication to public health and peoples around the world are better off, in very tangible ways, because of them.

Professor Bonita likes the concept of championing public health, and was delighted to be seen as a public health champion. She is passionate about the power of public health to bring about big changes to the health of a community, even a country.

"We can avoid a large number of premature deaths by simple and well known interventions," she says.

"Indeed, we need the whole population to be champions of public health so that politicians feel comfortable about turning evidence into policy."

Professor Beaglehole, who is the current chair of the Smokefree Coalition, believes one of the most pressing issues in public health is tobacco control.

"It will be possible for New Zealand to be free from tobacco by 2020. That is the vision of the Coalition and we are making strides towards it."

He said he and Ruth were particularly delighted by the award in that it was made to both of them.

For more information contact Anton Blank, Conference Media Liaison, 021 406 031

Photos of Robert and Ruth are available by request from Rob Zorn (rob@stonefish.co.nz).