Can Hospitals Contribute to the Public’s Health?

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Everyone loves hospitals. The almost universal access to television and mobile phones in our region means that a high proportion of people have seen dramatic presentations of the successes of hospitals. People viewing these favorable presentations may be living in countries with health budgets only a small fraction of the size of those supporting the glamorous TV hospitals. Very rarely, if ever, do we see soap operas devoted to vaccination programs or the benefits of breastfeeding or other public health programs. Yet it is hospitals that are always in the news for good or bad reasons. The New York Times (August 20, 2017) has a report of hospitals in India that are overloaded and lack oxygen or power supplies resulting in many unexpected deaths.¹ In Australia, a new $1.2 billion children’s hospital cannot open because a contaminated plumbing system is causing unsafe lead levels in drinking water.² But the press report that caught our attention was from Papua New Guinea announcing the intention to build a new hospital in Wabag, the capital of the Enga Province at a cost of $US159 million.³

Papua New Guinea is a country with great health needs, a population of 7.6 million with a life