

In March of this year I was fortunate enough to be given the opportunity to travel to Suva, Fiji for a month, supported by an Andrew Dent Student Scholarship. I went to Fiji to collect data for a research project I am conducting as part of the final year of my medical degree, investigating respiratory distress syndrome in Fijian preterm newborns. This is part of a larger project that aims to evaluate the sustainability and cost-effectiveness of introducing surfactant replacement therapy at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital (CWMH) in Suva, a treatment that has been used in high-income countries since the 1980s but has been slow to be introduced in low- and middle-income countries due to a number of factors, including cost.

Having the opportunity to conduct my research project in Fiji at CWMH was incredibly valuable, both professionally and personally. I learnt so much about planning and carrying out research, and because of the setting in which I was collecting data I had to become adept quite quickly at troubleshooting - most things didn't entirely go to plan, for all sorts of reasons. Having to think on my feet and solve issues as they arose, some 4000km away from being able to bug my supervisors with constant questions, was a fantastic learning experience. I took many missteps but learnt so much in the process, and ultimately the project was a success.

While I did spend most of my time at CWMH becoming very well acquainted with their medical records department, I also had the opportunity to spend some time in their Neonatal Intensive Care Unit to observe what care for neonates at the hospital is like and also speak to staff about some of the challenges they face working in an environment which is often quite under-resourced. While Fiji has comparatively good access to healthcare compared to many parts of the world, there are still many challenges related to funding, staffing, access to equipment and so on that complicate healthcare delivery in the country. Observing this first-hand was a humbling reminder of how spoiled I have been to only experience healthcare, both as a medical student and as a patient, in an Australian setting with seemingly endless resources.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of travelling to Fiji was being able to meet so many wonderful people in the hospital and build positive working relationships with doctors, nurses and research staff that will be invaluable as I progress in my medical training. Completing the project further spurred my interests in paediatrics and public health, and I think will lead to a long-standing interest in healthcare in the Pacific and a career in research.

On weekends I was able to travel to parts of Fiji outside its capital, Suva. A lot of this involved travelling to an island, lying in a hammock, eating copious amounts of delicious Fijian food and snorkelling at beautiful coral reefs (obviously very hard to take), but a lot also involved meeting people whose resilience I was astounded by in the wake of Tropical Cyclone Winston, which occurred just a few weeks before I arrived. Many people I met in villages I visited had their homes severely damaged or completely lost during the cyclone, but that never seemed to get in the way of them offering me a warm smile, and an invitation to sit, eat, drink and get to know them and their families.

This trip was an experience I gained so much from, and one I will never forget. It was fantastic to develop my research skills, gain insights into healthcare in another country, see some beautiful scenery and meet some equally beautiful people along the way. I would like to thank the St. Vincent's Pacific Health Fund for assisting with providing me the opportunity to undertake the project. I am exceptionally grateful.