

Vila Central Hospital, Port Vila, Vanuatu Elective Report

Sarika Suresh

Andrew Dent Student Scholarship Recipient 2018

My elective experience in Vanuatu has been truly eye opening. After hopping on a 3-hour flight to Port Vila, I could never have predicted the richness of cultural differences that awaited me so close to home.

My daily walk to hospital was along a dirt road, crossed by chickens, dogs and the occasional quad bike. I would not be able to walk more than a few metres without hearing “hello” “good morning” “good day” from every one of the locals I walked past. This was my first experience of the characteristic Melanesian kindness which extended beyond gender, race or age.



Our walk to hospital with a beautiful view!

I was then lucky enough to be surrounded by hospital staff who were incredibly supportive and patient with us medical students. They acted as our translators at first, but it didn't take long to pick up the local Bislama.

As a medical student accustomed to the almost unlimited resources and personnel available in Australian hospitals, my experience at Central Vila Hospital was incredibly confronting. I'd never had to think about a situation where there was not enough lignocaine to properly anaesthetize a wound before suturing, or had to think about the cost of sharps bins, which were quickly replaced with empty water-bottles with needles sticking out of all sides! On the weekends in the Emergency department, the pharmacy was closed, so the nurses even dispensed the medications themselves. I

be grateful for the care given to them whatever the outcome. I remember one man aged 60 who was a chief of his village, bringing his wife in to the emergency department for severe asthma. When my back was turned he called me “Aunty”, a term of endearment which I was shocked a man of his age and position in society would put upon a young medical student such as myself!

My three weeks in Vanuatu flew by, and were a blur of sun, sweat and tears attending ward rounds in the morning, going to waterfalls in the afternoon and night shifts in the Emergency Department at night. I could not have envisaged having such a wonderful time meeting people I hope I stay in touch with for life. I am incredibly thankful to the Pacific Health Fund for giving me this opportunity and hope to return to the Pacific one day and give back what they gave me.



Visiting the Mele cascade waterfalls with my travel buddy and fellow Andrew Dent scholar, Jennifer Xu