

## **Andrew Dent Scholarship**

Medical Elective Report

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I recently completed a combined two-week clinical and research placement at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital in Suva, Fiji. I spent most of my time split between clinical work with the paediatric team and research with the invasive pneumococcal disease surveillance team.

Fiji is an island country located in the South Pacific. As one of Australia's closest neighbors, the Pacific Islands have always been an area of interest, and I was elated to be given the opportunity to gain first hand experience working in this region of the world. Fiji is a country of great natural beauty but also significant socioeconomic disadvantage, and I was confronted at times by how different standards of care and resource availability was compared to hospitals at home in Australia.

I was motivated to undertake a placement in the Pacific to gain experience in clinical practice and research in a resource poor setting. I wanted to learn first hand the challenges of working in these settings and ways that these barriers are being broken down. I am very interested in global and public health and found the experience at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital an extremely valuable personal and professional learning experience.

The Colonial War Memorial Hospital is Fiji's largest hospital and serves as Fiji's major teaching and referral hospital. During the time I was there the paediatric department was always hectic with every bed occupied! The medical team had closed the entrance to outpatients for the two weeks I was there as they were overloaded with patients. Patients often presented late in their clinical course, tropical diseases were common (with a dengue fever outbreak when I was



The front of the paediatric department of the Colonial War Memorial Hospital (on a sunny day in wet season!).

visiting), and clinical investigations were not always 'at our fingertips' with the team carefully considering what tests needed to be done, and which ones were urgent. Similarly, treatment needed to consider what resources were available, how quickly they could be accessed and how much they would cost.

I was absolutely inspired by the dedication of the team I worked with. They worked long hours, were often run off their feet and faced clinically difficult decisions given the resources they had. Despite these challenges they were some of the friendliest and kindest people I have met. They always had time for my questions and went out of their way to make me feel included as part of the team.

The Invasive Pneumococcal Surveillance Team was based in the paediatric department of the Colonial War Memorial Hospital. The team there brought a wealth of experience, having worked on this project for 15 years. They walked me through all stages of the surveillance process, allowing me to understand the methodology of surveillance and epidemiological research. I was shown everything from the process of how patients are admitted to the study to the microbiology lab and PCR facilities. During my time with the team I assisted them with the process of tidying their data. This data will be used by the Centre of International Child Health in Melbourne to analyze epidemiological trends in childhood meningitis in Fiji after the introduction of the 10-valent pneumococcal vaccine in 2012. We are hoping that this will help inform policy decisions within the Fijian Ministry of Health regarding future vaccination coverage.



The Invasive Pneumococcal Surveillance team and I in the office! Names left to right: Sr. Varanise Rosa, Tupou Ratu, Tasmyn Soller, Sr. Seruwaia Young, Mere Malimali, Silvia Matanitobua



Overall this experience was an extremely enriching and humbling experience that allowed me to developed both personally and professionally. It also left me with a love of the Pacific and a strong desire to return in the near future! I am extremely grateful to the Andrew Dent Scholarship for giving me this once in a lifetime opportunity.



Afternoon hikes in Viti Levu