

**Andrew Dent Scholarship Report  
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**I'd like to first extend my deepest gratitude to the Andrew Dent Scholarship Fund for providing this deeply life-altering opportunity to visit and collaborate with the citizens and staff of Vila Central Hospital (VCH). This opportunity was invaluable in providing firm friendships with medical students and physicians from other countries, in the patient interaction in various clinical settings in a disparate culture than my home hospital in Sydney, and in the immersion and experience of the colorful cultures of different islands.**

**The Republic of Vanuatu is an island nation located in the South Pacific Ocean, 1,750 km east of Australia. The archipelago consists of 83 individual islands with a total approximate population of 320,000. Once under French-British rule, the nation was granted sovereignty in 1980 and currently exists under the framework of a constitutional democracy.**

**VCH is the nation's main hospital, with many patients hailing from distant islands and arriving via multiple modes of transport including boat, bus and car. The main burden of disease stems from cardiovascular disease, diabetes and its complications, neoplasms and infections. There is an emphasis on collaborative efforts within nations within the hospital staff hierarchy, with doctors and nurses hailing from Australia, New Zealand, Europe and China.**

**Due to being conversational in Mandarin Chinese, in my four weeks I was privileged enough to form a fast friendship with the 9 members of the Chinese doctors and nurses from Beijing Tongren Hospital, who will be working in VCH for a year. Despite the language barrier with communication from Ni-Van staff to patients, it was enriching to watch this collaborative effort between nations unfold. For example, during my week in surgery, I watched as the Chinese urologist learned from the Ni-Van general surgeon on how to perform an open prostatectomy, as TURPs are the bread and butter in their Beijing hospital. On the other hand, the Chinese doctors assisted and taught in ward rounds and assisted when needed in theaters, from anesthetics to surgery. The most exciting case was scrubbing into a debridement of a shark bite on a right thigh. This was coupled with an earthquake of 6.3 magnitude the same week!**

**My week in Internal Medicine with the consultant Dr. Sale was an immersion both in medicine and Vanuatu culture. Our timetable consisted of morning ward rounds then a varied patient list in Medicine clinic in the morning. We (the other medical students and I) were given relatively free reign in the clinic, taking our own patients and summarizing our plan at the end to Dr Sale, who would sign us off and tweak our plans. It was in this context that I was able to familiarize myself with the medications available and Vanuatu**

protocol for many diseases such as hypertension and diabetes, which formed the biggest patient burden in this clinic. By noon, we would clock off and head to either the local stall next to the hospital or drive to the big market by Port Vila for local food: an assembly of fresh fish, fruit and vegetables. Dr Sale provided us with island lessons on how to open a coconut with a machete, and how to crack open a peanut cleanly with one hand, all the while regaling us with tales from his medical career.

In O/G we were right in the action. In one week I assisted in a Caesarean section and helped with 3 vaginal births, one of which was a gestational diabetes mum where the baby had shoulder dystocia. Our group of medical students also presented to the O/G team with a Kahoot! Presentation on premature rupture of membranes, which allowed us to familiarize with the Vanuatu management protocol.

Outside of the hospital, our group of 9 medical students from 3 different countries traveled to the islands of Pele and Nguna on the weekends, even climbing an extinct volcano. I also connected with the Vanuatu National swim team, and with my experience in the sport, I was asked to conduct two swim clinics for the team in preparation for the athletes' upcoming World Championships trip in Doha in late February. We also attended and supported our fellow medical student in his football game, as he had joined the Port Vila team for their National Football Championships, where the team ultimately won the grand final.

The spirit of camaraderie and friendship I experienced on my medical elective, between medical students and the physicians, is not something I will take for granted. This eye opening experience allowed me to reflect on the facilities and opportunities medical students have at home in Australia, and especially the vast disparity in opportunity for doctors in training on the island. Speaking with various registrars, I realized the sheer inaccessibility of medical training that exists as a momentous barrier to the healthcare system: students have to earn one of a handful of scholarships every year to fund medical school training in Fiji or other countries such as Cuba or Australia and New Zealand, and this is compounded by the need for students' families to contribute funds, thereby emphasizing the importance of international relationships and their monetary aid.

I am indebted to this scholarship and the citizens of Vanuatu for this experience, and I am looking forward to coming back in future years as a future clinician.

Thankiu Tumas (Thank you).























