

Embarking on my medical elective in the Obstetrics and Gynaecology department in the Colonial War Memorial Hospital in Suva, Fiji was a transformative journey. It not only enhanced my medical skills but also enriched my understanding of global health challenges. The amalgamation of Fiji's cultural richness and the committed healthcare environment at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital served as the foundation for a profound exploration during my elective. This immersive experience seamlessly blended hands-on medical learning with a sincere appreciation for Fijian culture, providing valuable insights into the intricate complexities of healthcare disparities.



Two of my favourite pieces from the Fiji National Museum

During my medical elective, the hospital happened to be celebrating its 100-year anniversary. This allowed me to experience Fijian culture and healthcare more intimately. Current and former staff members of the hospital took to the streets in a float procession to celebrate the hospital's century-long journey. The growth from 100 to 550 beds, an increase in staff from 27 to 1600, and the transition from a single building to four wings plus three satellite facilities were not just statistics but a testament to the hospital's evolution. The hospital, once a provider of general services, had transformed into the Hub of Specialist Services in Fiji, a regional referral hospital, and the sole medical school in the region, training future generations of healthcare professionals.

The centennial celebration also included a three-day community healthcare promotion event where there were screening and education stalls and booths set up in the city. Healthcare workers came to teach the locals about important health-related topics, such as nutrition and oral health, and other healthcare groups set up booths to provide screening and consultations services for the community. Some of the free healthcare screenings I observed were blood pressure checks, blood sugar testing, cholesterol tests, eye checks and STI screenings. This occasion highlighted the importance of outreach and education in fostering holistic well-being.



A beautiful park in Suva

Within the hospital corridors, the dedication and kindness of healthcare professionals became intertwined with the narrative of the hospital's century-long journey. Doctors and midwives, not only shared their clinical expertise but also extended a hand of mentorship. The collaborative learning atmosphere created by their willingness to impart knowledge resonated beyond clinical skills, instilling a



The maternity ward in the Colonial War Memorial Hospital. All patients go through the 1st stage of labour in the '1st stage room', before moving to a single room (centre image) for the second and third stage.

profound understanding of the human side of medicine. Amidst these professional connections, one notable experience stood out. A doctor, fresh from a visit to hospitals in Australia, shared insights that echoed the stark differences in available resources. This encounter served as a poignant reminder of the disparities in healthcare infrastructure and deepened my appreciation for the dedication of Fijian healthcare workers who navigate daily challenges with resilience and grace.

There were a number of healthcare challenges I observed that I was not used to seeing in Melbourne. Most notable was the scarcity of resources, in particular the absence of analgesia during labour and the limited operating theatre space. Whilst confronting to observe, I was amazed by the resilience of both the patients and medical team who refused to let these barriers overcome them. When considering global healthcare injustices, I will never forget the fear I felt waiting hours for an operating theatre to be available to perform an emergency c-section for a distressed fetus. The challenges posed by the healthcare system prompted much reflection, and have sparked determination to contribute meaningfully to the global healthcare narrative.



Suva Municipal Market

Beyond the hospital, Suva unfolded as a captivating backdrop for cultural exploration. The bustling markets and the national museum provided glimpses into the soul of Fiji. The city, a living testament to the fusion of history and modernity, offered a canvas for a holistic understanding of Fijian life. Venturing into the beautiful beaches that adorned Fiji's coastline offered a beautifully tranquil escape from the city bustle and a time to reflect on my hospital placement.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Dent Family and the St Vincent's Hospital Pacific Health Fund Board, I recognize that this journey would not have been possible without your support. Your generosity not only broadened my clinical horizons but allowed me to witness the dedication of healthcare workers in Fiji and to explore the beauty that encapsulates Fiji.