

# Andrew Dent Scholarship Report

*Ashwin Agarwal, University of Melbourne*

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In late 2023, between my penultimate and final year of medical studies, I had the privilege of undertaking a medical elective in Fiji. Those four weeks were truly unforgettable and formative. Experiencing healthcare in a setting so different from my usual environment, surrounded by Fiji's stunning natural landscapes, and meeting the incredibly kind and generous people left a lasting impression on me.

I did my elective placement with the Medicine team at Colonial War Memorial Hospital (CWMH) in Suva, the capital city of Fiji. CWMH is the largest of the three major divisional hospitals in Fiji. In a country where healthcare is free to its citizens, and with only a limited private sector, CWMH serves as a cornerstone for health services, and has departments for Medicine, Surgery, Obstetrics & Gynaecology and Paediatrics, and serves as a teaching hospital for students of the local universities.



The similarities and differences in the healthcare settings compared to back home in Melbourne became apparent to me within just my first few days. Similar to in Australia, the structure of the day for the Medical Team was based around doing a morning ward round led by the consultant, after which the junior doctors would attend to actioning the many jobs flagged on the round that were required in order to further the diagnosis, treatment and/or management of the patients. The differences present were based mostly around the resourced-limited nature of the setting. The wards were open and warm, and with no air-conditioning, patients relied on the drift of wind coming through the windows, or on their own personal fans which their families would bring to the hospital. When it came to accessing investigation results, this would often require physically retrieving the results from the pathology lab, or viewing CT scans in the single room which had computers capable of showing scans.

This setting meant that healthcare staff utilise their skills and resources available to them to the fullest degree. The Medicine team is highly generalised, with subspecialty teams only for cardiology and renal, thus meaning the doctors are required to draw on their full range of Internal Medicine knowledge and expertise, seeing patients with a whole range of pathologies, ranging from more 'straight-forward' neurology and respiratory conditions to patients with potentially complex and rare rheumatology and haematological issues. Additionally, the junior doctors are required to be very hands-on. Not only do the interns carry out the administrative jobs of patient care – e.g. chasing up bloods, organising imaging – they are responsible for doing the vast majority of bedside procedures – anything from venepunctures and cannulas to blood cultures and ascitic taps.

Towards the latter end of my placement, I had the opportunity to join the hospital's palliative care nurse on his trips to the homes of patients with advanced cancer. This initiative, the 'Home Visitation Program', is a partnership between the Ministry of Health and the Fiji Cancer Society, and it helps provide psychosocial support to patients as well as supplies such as medications, dressings and stoma bags to maximise their comfort at home. On these trips, we drove to homes in distant and remote locations, seeing a wide range of the socio-economic circumstances of these patients.



Outside of my time at the hospital, I was lucky to be able to experience some of Fiji's natural beauty. A highlight was undoubtedly my day trip to the absolutely stunning natural wonder that is the Sigotoka Sand Dunes. I was also able to spend a few days enjoying the beautiful beaches of Volivoli, on the northern tip of the main island of Fiji.

Overall, I had an incredible time in Fiji, and I am very thankful to the support of the St Vincent's Pacific Health Fund – without whom, this elective would not have been possible.

