

## Pacific Island Oral Health Projects- 1996 – 2017 (incomplete)

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There's the oft quoted Chinese saying - Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day

Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.

But sometimes this can appear a little trite; .....

Just think - for that same person add a fishing boat and a fishing net, and you could feed a whole village!!

So we took a broader approach aiming to come up with a more comprehensive and collaborative approach based on the identified dental needs of several underdeveloped nations in the South Pacific .

Our aim has always been to encourage self-sufficiency and try to move away from simply providing short term clinical visits with all the problems this perpetuates.

Although we have initiated many different projects, involving Tonga, Fiji, Cook Islands, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu here I have bundled them all together in this article. This has all been made possible by a multidisciplinary team of dedicated and experienced dental professionals many of whom have who have repeatedly offered their services and provided essential donations for no cost. As a result the funding needed for all this work has been negligible.

#### **From the very beginning we set these Aims and Objectives for our projects;**

- **To make contacts and foster positive relationships with relevant people and their associates from the Pacific Island dental communities, hospitals, governments, Rotary, and aid agencies.**
- **To undertake basic needs assessments of dental services and identify potential areas in which the program may collaborate to help Pacific Islanders in the self-development of their dental health care system.**
- **To assist, teach and support,(but not to do!) by means of ongoing visits of multi-disciplinary dental teams.**
- **Where possible to obtain by donations, urgently needed items of dental equipment and materials suitable for the Pacific Island public dental clinics.**

In the beginning.....

The Tonga Dental Project began in 1996 when a group of five dental volunteers visited Tonga in conjunction with the Rotary Club of Ballarat West, and the St. John of God Hospital (Ballarat) /Vaiola Hospital (Tonga) twinning program. This has continued ever since with annual visits, usually of two weeks duration, by multi-disciplinary teams of volunteers. It has since been extended to include projects in Fiji, the Cook Islands, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Personnel involved so far have included

- Dentists (from Australia and overseas),
  - Orthodontists and other dental specialists
  - Dental Equipment Engineers,
  - Dental nurses,
  - Dental Therapists,
  - Dental Prosthetists,
  - Specialist Maxillo-Facial Surgeon,
  - University Lecturers and Academics,
  - and others such as a Plumber, Air-conditioning expert, Scientific Photography student
- It has also involved Tongan dental staff on educational visits to Ballarat and Melbourne

All participants have been volunteers who pay all their own air fares and accommodation costs, donating their time and expertise at no cost to the project, and all Tongan staff visits to Australia have been sponsored. The success of this work is largely due to this extraordinary group of dental professionals, many who have made repeated visits and provided materials and equipment at their own expense and through their contacts and well as passing on valuable education and experience.

**Full illustrated reports are available on all of these projects on request by email**

**Past projects include work in;-**

- **Infection Control**
- **Equipment Donations**
- **Equipment maintenance and training**
- **Education - clinical**
- **Education - Oral Health education**
- **Dental prosthetics - infrastructure and training**
- **Preventive Dentistry**
- **Oral Health school surveys**
- **Donations of dental supplies**
- **Analysis of natural fluoride levels in reticulated water supplies**
- **Presentations at Rotary clubs, local and international dental conferences and others**
- **Support via DIK such as donations of computers, schoolbooks, clothing, medical supplies, etc.**
- **Building construction, plumbing and air-conditioning installations**

### **Infection Control.**

#### **Our initial first priority!**

Safer Infection Control procedures were introduced for the first time into the Dental Clinics in Tonga in 1996 as a result of these volunteer visits, which beforehand were largely ineffective..

Also upgraded in the main hospital itself with the initiation of an infection control committee at Vaiola Hospital in 1997 chaired by Rod McLean)

Education, provision of equipment (autoclaves etc.), training, monitoring & supervision,

Production of a Tongan language training video, VCR and CD-ROM was produced by 3 Rotary FAIM teams under the direction of Senior I.C. Lecturer Rod McLean from RMIT University, with filming by RMIT

Scientific Photography student Kara Burns. An original script was written and tailored to be suitable and affordable for the current Tongan conditions. The Tongan dental staff were the actors used in the production.

Professional Voiceover productions in both English (ABC Radio Melbourne ) and Tongan (SBS Radio Sydney) languages. Sponsorship came from the RMIT education, IT and drama departments



Filming the RMIT Infection Control video 1998



Royal endorsement by Princess Pilolevu

