

# Global Health Spec

By Gabbi Hamilton

## About the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS)

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) is a non-profit membership organisation training surgeons and maintaining surgical standards in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand (AoNZ). RACS' primary purpose is providing education, training and research in the practice of surgery.

More than 7000 surgeons and 1300 surgical trainees across nine specialties are registered with the organisation.

One arm of the organisation is the Global Health Department. RACS Global Health has a vision that *'safe surgical and anaesthetic care is available and accessible to everyone'*. The distinct international development contribution of RACS Global Health programmes is that RACS works in direct partnership with national governments, regional organisations, hospitals, surgeons, and patients to ensure we can support health systems strengthening with a central focus on workforce capacity-building. This is with the aim to enable sustainability of health services into the future.

Through collaboration with Asia-Pacific regional partners, RACS Global Health ensures that programmes are driven by the self-determined needs and priorities of the national governments we work with. Activities are designed in consultation with, and at the request of, Pacific Island country Ministries of Health. These activities align with both individual national health priorities and regional concerns and opportunities.

## The Pacific Islands Programme (PIP)

RACS Global Health is currently managing nine programmes across

**Abstract** The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) Global Health has a vision that *'safe surgical and anaesthetic care is available and accessible to everyone'*. Through partnerships with ministries of health across the Asia-Pacific, RACS Global Health works to build local workforce capacity, strengthen health systems and provide specialist surgical mentoring and training. Since the opening of the Cook Islands quarantine-free travel bubble, and with talks of quarantine-free travel extending to other Pacific countries, RACS Global Health is seeking expressions of interest from Aotearoa New Zealand (AoNZ) Perioperative Nurses who would like to participate in upcoming overseas activities.

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13 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, the largest being the Pacific Islands Programme (PIP). PIP has been synonymous with RACS Global Health since it was launched in 1995. Funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the last two decades have seen more than 600 volunteer medical teams visit 11 Pacific Island countries, providing over 60,000 consultations and 16,000 procedures.

In 2016, RACS entered into a new five-year grant agreement with DFAT to extend PIP until 2021,

with activities covering all specialised clinical services, including surgery, anaesthesia, cardiology, nursing, radiology, nephrology, psychiatry and more. The key to this has been strengthening ties with other Australian, AoNZ and Pacific Island specialist associations and colleges. Programme activities seek to support medical education, hospital services, clinical governance, workforce planning, the continuing professional development of clinicians, and the systems and structures that support their function. The overall aim of the programme is to ensure that healthcare in Pacific Island countries is affordable, appropriate to local needs, is accessible and of good quality.

RACS Specialist Medical Volunteers play an invaluable role in the development of the Pacific surgical workforce. Since 2016, 178 volunteers from Australia and AoNZ have been deployed to Pacific Island countries to support clinical activities and capacity development. This includes 42 surgeons, 50 specialist nurses, 26 anaesthetists, and 80 clinical specialists in audiology, pathology, radiology, psychiatry, dermatology, and other



# Specialist Volunteering



Amanda Richardson in the Solomon Islands.

areas. Their contribution has made a significant impact on the lives of individual patients and clinicians in the Asia-Pacific region.

*“Participating in five voluntary PIP trips [has] given me so much personal pleasure and growth. It has been professionally rewarding and so satisfying to be able to provide a service to our Pacific neighbours.”* - Amanda Richardson, current PIP specialist volunteer.

## Insights from a perioperative nurse volunteer

Amanda Richardson is a registered Perioperative Nurse with an interest in ear nose and throat (ENT) surgery. In 2013, Amanda accompanied her first ENT team, comprising of two surgeons and an anaesthetist, to Pohnpei in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) to provide ENT surgery to patients who would otherwise not have access to the required care. Since this initial visit, Amanda has accompanied the team back to FSM and to the Solomon Islands annually (until the recent COVID-19 global pandemic placed a pause on all RACS Global Health visiting medical teams).

Amanda has “enjoyed everything about [her] experience. The travel and exploring these areas are highlights but mostly [she has] enjoyed helping and making a difference to the patients [she has] cared for.”

Becoming a RACS Global Health specialist volunteer is a highly rewarding opportunity to make a difference in countries where the access to specialist medical care can be lacking. Amanda told RACS that she has always wanted to work in remote locations and “to be able to use [her] skills in less advantaged areas”.

Although adapting to working in a Pacific hospital can be a challenge, as the equipment and infrastructure is not always on par with Australian and New Zealand hospitals, Amanda explained that she was able to think outside the box and to adapt her skills and training to provide nursing care that is safe and effective for each patient she sees.

## Volunteering with RACS

RACS Specialist Medical Volunteers are the backbone of RACS Global Health programmes. Without the extraordinary commitment and skills

provided by volunteers such as Amanda, RACS Global Health would not be able to provide surgical and educational support to our Pacific neighbours.

Since the opening of the Cook Islands quarantine-free travel bubble, and with talks of quarantine-free travel extending to other Pacific countries, RACS Global Health is seeking expressions of interest from interested New Zealand Perioperative Nurses who would like to participate on upcoming overseas activities.

*"[Being a RACS Global Health Specialist Volunteer] is the most amazing, exhilarating, interesting and challenging experience ever. You meet so many interesting people and get to do some good for those patients who appreciate and are so grateful for your help."* – Amanda Richardson

While on overseas deployment, all travel, accommodation, transport, pre-trip medical checks and meals will be funded by RACS.

RACS has also engaged International SOS to provide health and security advice and support to our volunteers.

Before being accepted as a RACS Global Health Specialist Volunteer, applicants must complete a two-stage interview selection process to assess their clinical competency and suitability for overseas deployment. If selected, volunteers will be asked to complete RACS Global Health's key compliance processes including undertaking a New Zealand Ministry of Justice Criminal Check and completing several online training modules.

For further information on volunteering with RACS Global Health, please refer to the RACS Global Health Deployment Guidebook. This

resource provides comprehensive information about volunteering on a RACS Global Health programme.

### How to apply

If you wish to apply to become a RACS Global Health Specialist Volunteer, please email [volunteer@surgeons.org](mailto:volunteer@surgeons.org) and provide the following:

- Current CV
- Copy of qualifications
- Registration Certificate with the Medical Council of New Zealand
- A short paragraph about why you wish to become a RACS Global Health Specialist Medical Volunteer (previous international experience will be seen as desirable but is not a requirement of the role)

To find out more about RACS Global Health programmes, please visit our website. ■



Orthopaedic Visiting Medical Team In Vanuatu 2018. Photo Darren James