
ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

MEDIA RELEASE



Is a paediatric surgical service in Vanuatu sustainable?

Monday 6 May, 2013

Delegates to the 82nd Annual Scientific Congress (ASC) of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons have been told of the local and external challenges that must be overcome if the Pacific island nation of Vanuatu is to develop and sustain a paediatric surgical service.

Dr Basil Leodoro, a general surgeon from Vanuatu, told the ASC's international forum that infant mortality rates had fallen in Vanuatu from 141/1000,000 in 1960 to 34/100,000 in 2002, mostly due to early diagnosis and treatment of infectious diseases as well as improved public health measures and maternal education.

"Whilst primary care and preventative measures have been around for decades, specialist paediatric surgical services have only been made available in Vanuatu since 2010 under the Pacific Island Program (PIP) funded by AusAID," Dr Leodoro said.

"As in most of the small Pacific island nations, this program illustrates the importance of partnerships in providing specialised surgical services and its long term goals have been to assist Vanuatu in becoming self-reliant.

"From a local perspective, questions must be raised as to how independent Vanuatu can become in sustaining a specialised surgical service, given the local and external challenges that must be overcome. These include delayed presentation of patients with paediatric surgical disease, a shortage of medical resources and staffing, limited funds for investigation, assessment and management of paediatric surgical cases and a need for specialist paediatric surgical training of surgeons, anaesthetists and nursing staff. Political instability also affects the support needed from a governance and leadership point of view.

"Having said that, some of the solutions to these problems may not be as remote as one might assume. For example, there are well established ties with the College, PIP teams, regional Consultants and donors who regularly assist local surgeons in both a clinical and training capacity. From the community level up to the tertiary care level there is a focus on supporting paediatric surgical patients and their families. These efforts and relationships must be sustained and fostered."

Dr Leodoro said his presentation to the international forum was an opportunity for creative discussion of the problems facing clinicians and their patients not just in Vanuatu but in all smaller Pacific island nations.

Approximately 1200 surgeons from New Zealand, Australia and around the world are attending the ASC, which runs from 6 to 10 May and is being held at Auckland's Skycity/Crowne Plaza Convention Centre.

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