

Dr John Kearney (right) observing Dr Padwick Gallen undertake a procedure



Continuing a vision

Dr John Kearney continues his support for the development of ophthalmology services in the Pacific

With diabetic eye disease looming as a social catastrophe in many Pacific Island nations, the discovery by an Australian eye team of a disused purpose-built optometry/ophthalmology consulting room at the Pohnpei State Hospital in Micronesia was a surprise highlight of the trip taken in January 2012.

With both a functioning slip lamp and refractor head, the room has become the focus of a campaign by team member and Queensland ophthalmologist Dr John Kearney to source the equipment to enable the suite to again become fully-operational.

Dr Kearney, an Associate Professor of Ophthalmology at Bond University and senior eye surgeon at the Gold Coast

Eye Clinic, has been providing surgical eye care to the people of the Pacific, including Papua New Guinea and East Timor, for almost 20 years.

To support the delivery of eye services to people in the region, Dr Kearney is determined to restore the existing optometry/ophthalmology consulting suite at Pohnpei State Hospital and have the equipment to treat those in need.

“There had been a Micronesian ophthalmologist, but he died a few years ago and was not replaced which in turn meant that the consulting suite [in Pohnpei] was no longer in use,” Dr Kearney said.

“We are working to re-equip the clinic and I have been begging companies for equipment and so far we have had offers

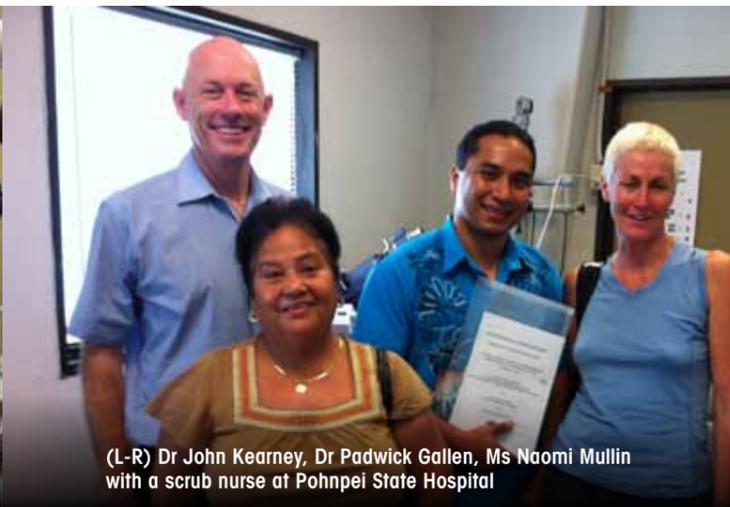
of help from Alcon, Designs for Vision, Optimed and my mother.”

Dr Kearney and a four-member team visited the two Micronesian states of Pohnpei and Kosrae for two weeks in January 2013, organised by the College as part of its AusAID-funded Pacific Islands Program.

With optometrist Mr Michael Hare, Dr Kearney and his team conducted 21 surgeries in Kosrae and 25 in Pohnpei.

During the visit, the team were able to service medical equipment that Pohnpei State Hospital already owned, but that had fallen into disrepair. Dr Kearney was pleased with the quality of the equipment that the hospital now has on hand.

So committed is Dr Kearney to the people of the region, that during an earlier visit to the Micronesian state of



(L-R) Dr John Kearney, Dr Padwick Gallen, Ms Naomi Mullin with a scrub nurse at Pohnpei State Hospital



Dr Padwick Gallen & Dr John Kearney treating a patient



Dr Padwick Gallen pictured

Photos courtesy of Naomi Mullin

Yap three years ago, he not only identified and recruited a surgical resident to undertake a Diploma of Ophthalmology at the Pacific Eye Institute at Suva, but paid for it.

After completing his Post-Graduate Diploma in Ophthalmology in 2012, Dr Kearney and his team were pleased to formally present Dr Padwick Gallen with the Mrs Alison Kearney scholarship on their most recent visit to Micronesia. The scholarship, a foundation established by Dr Kearney's mother and after whom the scholarship is named, will enable Dr Gallen to undertake his Masters of Medicine in Ophthalmology at the Pacific Eye Institute in 2013.

Governor John Ehsa, Governor of Pohnpei, who attended the scholarship presentation ceremony at Pohnpei State

Hospital, thanked Dr Kearney and his team for helping equip the hospital of Pohnpei to serve the needs of its people.

Dr Kearney said that his team has also identified nurses at the hospital who may benefit from further studies at the Pacific Eye Institute so that when Dr Gallen returns as a qualified eye specialist, there will be personnel available to help him provide services that Pohnpei has not previously been able to offer.

While the incidence of diabetic retinopathy was significant and consistent with the very high incidence of diabetes in the general population, most severe vision loss was directly related to cataract and to a lesser extent pterygiums.

Dr Kearney said he believed that Micronesia required regular team visits each year until they have their own in-

country full-time ophthalmologist with yearly supervisory visits then made to supplement training, provide mentorship and to maintain standards.

He particularly wished to thank the staff of the College's International Development department for their skills, assistance and expert management of such teams.

“[College] staff undertaking the necessary and effective administration of these programs allows me and my team to get into these countries of need and get straight to work and that is of inestimable value,” he said.

Dr Kearney also praised members of the local eye teams for their skills and enthusiasm.