



Image: Patients waiting for eye consultations in Sumba, Eastern Indonesia (Photographer: Ellen Smith)

# Across the Asia-Pacific with Global Health



**PHILL CARSON**  
Chair, Global Health

Over five billion people lack access to safe, affordable and timely surgical and anaesthesia care. RACS Global Health is working across the Asia-Pacific to help change this. This year's World Health Day campaign was 'Depression: let's talk', with the World Health Organisation raising depression as being the leading cause of ill health and disability worldwide. The Pacific Islands Program (PIP) is taking a holistic approach to health in the Solomon Islands, working in collaboration with the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) to find a way forward in the delivery of a psychiatry clinical visit and working toward community-orientated mental health services. Mental health was

identified as a top health priority at the 9th Meeting of Ministers of Health for the Pacific Island Countries in Honiara, Solomon Islands, in June 2011. Ministers agreed that mental health issues, if not addressed appropriately and immediately, will continue to grow, with a significant adverse impact on health and socioeconomic development.

## Australia Timor-Leste Program of Assistance for Secondary Services (ATLASS II)

**Project Director: Professor Glenn Guest FRACS**

The *Australia Timor-Leste Program of Assistance for Secondary Services – Phase II (ATLASS II)* is a health workforce development program funded by the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and managed by RACS. The program is currently the only provider of postgraduate medical education and training in Timor-Leste. Through the delivery of postgraduate training in Family Medicine, Anaesthesia, Paediatrics, Surgery, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Emergency Medicine, Ophthalmology and Internal Medicine, 98 Timorese doctors have received training in critical skills relevant to the Timorese context, and are now placed in medical facilities

across Timor-Leste. These graduates are strengthening the national health workforce—particularly in rural and remote areas where access to quality health care is often scarce.

In December 2016, 11 Timorese doctors successfully completed an ATLASS II Postgraduate Diploma in Surgery, Anaesthesia or Paediatrics. With the exception of two trainees, these doctors have been with ATLASS II since 2014, when they enrolled in the Family Medicine Program Year 1 training. The successful completion of their diploma training is a culmination of two and a half years of hard work, determination and dedication, and the RACS Timor-Leste program is immensely proud of their achievements. In May of this year, these doctors will formally graduate from the National University of Timor-Leste.

2017 is set to be an exciting year for the program. In addition to the graduation of trainees from the National University ATLASS II is also looking forward to enrolling new cohorts of doctors across the Foundation Year and Postgraduate Diploma programs. Of particular importance, the Postgraduate Diploma in Internal Medicine will be delivered for the first time. The RACS Timor-Leste team is excited that the program is able to respond to the Timorese Ministry of Health's priorities for the health sector as well as deliver multiple training programs.

## East Timor Eye Program (ETEP)

**Project Director: Assoc. Prof Nitin Verma AM, Companion of the College**

The East Timor Eye Program kicked off its outreach program in Manatuto in January this year, performing 120 eye health consultations and 39 operations. Following on from the Manatuto visit, in late February the team travelled to Los Palos, a small town approximately 250 kilometres east of Dili with a population of around 18,000. The response to this five-day visit was overwhelming: more than 400 patients were screened and 64 life-changing surgeries were performed. It was one of the busiest outreach visits ever undertaken in Los Palos. Of the 64 operations performed, 62 were to treat cataracts – the leading cause of preventable blindness in Timor-Leste.

Along with the local eye care nurse Jhonjino and the resident outreach team from the Department of Ophthalmology, RACS ophthalmologist Dr Manoj Sharma, Timorese Ophthalmology Registrar Dr Bernadete Pereira and Swiss Ophthalmology Fellow Dr David Brunner also accompanied the outreach team to Los Palos. Over the coming 10 months, the Department of Ophthalmology will deliver a further 11 outreach visits across Timor-Leste. With limited eye-health services available in the districts, a poorly functioning referral system and limited transportation options to the

nation's capital, these outreach services - made possible through ETEP with funding from the Lions SightFirst program, are the only source of eye care services for many communities outside of Dili. To find out more about the East Timor Eye Program visit: [etep.org.au](http://etep.org.au)

## Pacific Islands Program (PIP)

**Project Director: Mr Teariki (Kiki) Maoate FRACS ONZM**

The Pacific Islands Program (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 past twenty years has 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 5-year grant agreement with DFAT to extend the program until 2021, activities now covering all specialised clinical services including but not limited to surgery, anaesthesia, cardiology, nursing, radiology, nephrology, psychiatry and more. Key to this has been strengthening ties with other Australian, New Zealand, and Pacific Island specialist associations and colleges; where in 2016 the first All-Specialist-Colleges Global Health Meeting was held, bringing together leading clinical organisations to discuss approaches to harmonising activities in Global Health across the region.

A key component of the new program looks at strengthening regional tertiary education institutions for specialised clinical services, and partners in the program include Fiji National University and the Pacific Community. Additionally, activities aim to strengthen workforce planning, the continuing professional development of clinicians, and the systems and structures that support their function throughout the Pacific. 2017 has already proven to be a productive and energetic year for the program, with more than 25 clinical teams organised for visits throughout 2017.

More people die each year from lack of access to emergency and essential surgical care than do from HIV, TB, and malaria combined. It is estimated that by 2030, the lost financial output across the globe from death and disability due to continued poor access to safe and affordable surgery could total USD \$12.3 trillion, reducing annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in low and middle income countries by as much as two per cent. Such programs like the Pacific Islands Program are key to tackling these issues, experienced by many of our neighbouring countries.

Overall, RACS Global Health looks forward to this new era of the Pacific Islands Program, where a comprehensive approach to specialised clinical services



Image: East Timor Eye Program consultation (Photographer: Ellen Smith)

seeks to facilitate change across all levels, from the individual level of the clinician, to the systems level of regional coordination and networking.

## Myanmar

**Project Director: Dr James Kong FRACS**

In partnership with the Myanmar Medical Association, Ministry of Health and University of Medicine, RACS Global Health continues to support Emergency Medicine and Primary Trauma Care (PTC) training in Myanmar, responding to needs identified by the Myanmar Ministry of Health for medical capacity-building. The national PTC leadership group is effectively managing PTC training in Myanmar under the mentorship of an international faculty. It is anticipated that the establishment of a national PTC Foundation in the next three years will be the final step in the transition of PTC training in Myanmar, which will culminate to local ownership and independence.

RACS Global Health is also working with the Myanmar Surgical and Orthopaedic Societies to deliver surgical and non-technical skills training, to develop local capacity in key areas of patient care including critical care, infection control and quality assurance. In March 2016, a team of four volunteer instructors delivered a Surgical Skills training program in Yangon and Mandalay. This was the fourth

Surgical Skills Program delivered in Myanmar, however the first to extend beyond Yangon to Mandalay.

## Asia Paediatric Surgical Education Project (APSEP)

**Project Director: Assoc. Prof Chris Kimber FRACS**

The Asia Paediatric Surgical Education Project (APSEP) aims to improve health outcomes for children in South-East Asia, by training national health staff to provide improved paediatric surgery to their communities, and by promoting the development of sustainable, regional professional networks.

In 2016, five Cambodian and Vietnamese specialists developed leadership, technical and patient management skills and gained in-depth understanding of advanced hospital and patient management systems during hospital attachments in Australia. Since completing this training, these specialists have successfully led their surgical teams to implement changes to their clinical practice and approach to patient management in their home hospitals. Reports indicate that these changes have led to improved patient outcomes in their respective hospital, and that the specialists have passed on their new skills to colleagues.

In addition, 215 Southeast Asian health personnel received specialist paediatric training through targeted skills courses and clinical on-the-job training, 154 Cambodian children with disorders of sexual development



Image: Paediatric clinical visit, Timor-Leste (Photographer: Ellen Smith)



Image: Anaesthetist, Dr Timothy Webb, with a patient at Colonial War Memorial Hospital, Fiji (Photographer: Darren James)

received a consultation by the Monash Children's Hospital International (MCHI) and RACS visiting specialists and local doctors in training. Angkor Hospital for Children Management and MCHI-RACS worked together to define a clear scope of surgical capability for hospital staff, with a future focus on safer implementation of core skills and reduction of complex surgical conditions being treated.

In 2017, the APSEP will support health outcomes for children through improved knowledge and skill sets of national surgeons; development of loco-regional clinical networks, training and education and development of culturally specific approaches to management of paediatric surgical diseases; and improved health outcomes for children with complex congenital disorders.

## Sumba Eye Program (SEP)

**Project Director: Dr Mark Ellis FRACS AM**

The Sumba Eye Program, established in 2007, is targeted at delivering eye care services to the people of Sumba and building the capacity of the local and regional health staff to provide effective eye care for the community in Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT), Eastern Indonesia.

In 2016, the Australian team delivered two clinical and training visits in collaboration with the Sumba Foundation and regional ophthalmologists from Hassanuddin University, Sulawesi to promote skills transfer and capacity building. The purpose of the visit was to work alongside

and mentor two Sumbanese eye care nurses in an effort to help establish a sustainable local infrastructure for eye care in Sumba. The nurses have demonstrated increased competency and confidence identifying pathology, refracting and the appropriate provision of spectacles.

In 2017, the Australian team will continue to support the health needs of the people of Sumba. As part of support and development of capacity of local health staff in Sumba, two Sumba Eye Care nurses visited Melbourne and Sydney in March this year. The nurses visited various sites and observed various techniques for the refraction and detection of common eye diseases. They are now back in Sumba transferring the skills learnt to their local community.

## Global Health at the ASC

The Global Health Program at the RACS 86th Annual Scientific Congress in Adelaide this year is set to be an exciting one, convened by Assoc. Prof Suren Krishnan FRACS with visiting keynote speakers Dr Mark Shrime, Research Director, at the Harvard Program in Global Surgery and Social Change and Professor Rajat Gyaneshwar, Founder of the Viseisei Sai Health Centre in Fiji.

For further details visit [asc.surgeons.org](http://asc.surgeons.org) and join the conversation using #RACSGlobalHealth on Twitter.

 **#RACSGlobalHealth**