

Celebrating International Women's Day

What better way to celebrate International Women's Day than with guest speaker, Australian-East Timorese activist and founder of the Alola Foundation, Kirsty Sword Gusmão.

On Wednesday 8 March, men and women across the globe celebrated International Women's Day and Melbourne was no exception. RACS Global Health hosted a morning tea where colleagues and guests were invited to show their support on this important day. Distinguished guest speaker, Kirsty Sword Gusmão, Founder of the Alola Foundation, First Lady of Timor-Leste from 2002-2007 and Community Advisor to the RACS Global Health Committee was invited to share a few words.



Kirsty delivered a bold and inspirational speech in line with this year's International Women's Day campaign theme *Be Bold For Change*. She honoured the late Dr Katherine Edyvane FRACS for her remarkable contribution to health care in developing countries, particularly in Timor-Leste. Kirsty also spoke of the work of the Alola Foundation, supporting women and children of Timor-Leste to build a stronger future through education, economic empowerment, health and community leadership.

In Timor-Leste, maternal and child health outcomes are particularly dire, one in 12 children dies before the age of five from poor neonatal health and preventable diseases, and one woman dies during childbirth per 180 live births¹ this is largely due to limited maternal health care resources. Through Alola's Maternal and Child Health Program, women are encouraged to give birth with appropriate medical support with community-based health support networks.

The RACS managed, *Australia Timor-Leste Program of Assistance in Secondary Services (ATLASS)* also directly supports improved maternal and child health outcomes through various programs including, Post Graduate Diplomas in Paediatrics, Family Medicine and O&G, and the Master of Medicine (Paediatrics). With the maternal health outcomes for women in Timor-Leste being amongst the poorest in the world, certainly in the Asia Pacific Region this postgraduate training has never been more vital.

In her role as Community Advisor, Kirsty has played a key part in the Global Health Committee since 2015. The Committee advises RACS Council on matters concerning global health activities of the College. In her acceptance letter, Kirsty noted: "I have been privileged to have connections with a number of RACS

doctors and projects over the past fifteen years or so, and I have great admiration for the work you do".

The RACS New South Wales Regional Office also organised a special event Gender Does Matter through the Women in Medicine Network for Fellows and Trainees. Keynote speaker Fiona Cameron from Screen Australia facilitated the discussions and Associate Prof Charlotte Hespe, Dr Michelle Atkinson FRACS and medical student Leonara Long were panel members.

International Women's Day serves as a reminder for how much more work there is to be done until we achieve gender parity and equality. RACS is committed to Women in Surgery by expanding the number of women in surgical training and ensuring that training programs do not disadvantage them. The development of the Women in Surgery Section and mentoring programs for Trainees reflect that commitment.

The RACS Post Op Podcast 'Changing lives and opportunities for the women of Timor-Leste' with Kirsty Sword Gusmão is now available on iTunes at <https://itunes.apple.com/au/podcast/racs-post-op-podcast/id1125227899?mt=2>. To find out more about the Alola Foundation visit: www.alola.org.au

1 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Australia Timor-Leste Partnership for Human Development: Investment Design Document

Kirsty Sword Gusmão

Kirsty Sword Gusmão - born in Melbourne, Australia, in 1966.

- Educated at University of Melbourne and Monash University | Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Indonesian and Italian | Diploma of Education
- pre-1991 – Administrative Secretary with Overseas Service Bureau
- 1991 – Assistant to the Development Coordinator, Oxford University Refugee Studies Program
- 1991 – Researcher/Interpreter for the Yorkshire Television political documentary *In Cold Blood: The Massacre of East Timor*
- 1992-1996 – Teacher and human rights campaigner, Jakarta, Indonesia
- 2002-2007 – First Lady of Timor-Leste
- 2001 – Founded the Alola Foundation
- 2003 – Autobiography: *A Woman of Independence: A story of love and the birth of a new nation* released
- 2007 – Goodwill Ambassador for Education of Timor-Leste
- 2015 – Officer of the Order of Australia
- 2015-Present – Community Advisor RACS Global Health Committee
- 2016-Present – Community Engagement and Development Coordinator at Asylum Seeker Resource Centre

