



Image: Dr Bill Glasson examines patients in Oecussi

Support in sight for East Timor Eye Program

The coastal and isolated community of Oecussi, Timor-Leste will receive further eye health and First Aid support from both RACS and St John Ambulance Australia (SJAA), as a result of an extension of partnership for a further three years just signed between both parties.

The agreement, in support of the East Timor Eye Program (ETEP), will ensure that Oecussi's residents continue to receive annual consultations and surgical care from visiting Australian eye teams. Timor-Leste has a large rural population, with 72 per cent of the population residing in remote areas. Many people suffering from avoidable eye conditions such as cataracts reside in rural communities and it is not uncommon for family members to travel for hours by foot to access medical services.

In a collaboration lasting more than eight years, the visiting teams have provided over 1,964 eye consultations, 521 operations and prescribed more than 904 spectacles. SJAA volunteers have assisted the visiting ophthalmology and optometry team with screening patients and performing visual acuity tests, providing First Aid Supplies and delivering essential First Aid Training to ambulance officers and nursing staff at the Oecussi District Referral Hospital.

Currently, there is only one eye care nurse and one eye care technician based at the Oecussi District Referral Hospital. The partnership and annual visits help contribute to the

upskilling of the national health personnel and leads to significantly improved health outcomes for Timorese patients based in Oecussi.

Mr Kevin Vandeleur FRACS and Dr Bill Glasson are long term ETEP volunteer ophthalmologists and make the annual trip to Oecussi. Dr Glasson, who has volunteered his skills and visited Oecussi for over a decade, explains the progress of the health system in the region, particularly since the SJAA and ETEP collaboration began:

“...there has been a major transition in terms of infrastructure in the form of a new hospital, operating theatre and outpatients. This has made a tremendous difference in delivering the services that we do there on an annual basis”.

Oecussi, a landlocked Timorese district, is a coastal enclave; therefore access to this district can be a challenging journey. Thanks to the support of the Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) General Charter, visiting personnel from Australia are able to provide medical support and supplies.

The East Timor Eye Program continues to have a strong capacity building focus with the training and upskilling of Timorese registrars and Post Graduate Diploma of Ophthalmology (PGDO) trainees. Dr Bill Glasson said that the standards now offered by the Timorese in terms of the eye health care workers, the optometrists and the nurses can only be described as exceptional.

For more information about the East Timor Eye Program visit: etep.org.au