

# Prepared for trauma

Samoa was able to set up an effective system after the tsunami due to the skills learned at the Primary Trauma Course

Last year, the serendipitous timing in the provision of AusAID -sponsored, College-managed trauma training to Samoa assisted local medical staff to cope with the unprecedented stresses caused by the September 30 tsunami that devastated the small island nation.

The emergency response plan that grew out of the trauma course - now known as the "Savaai model" after the Samoan island upon which it was developed - enabled the Samoan health authorities to set up an effective triage and management system before international aid arrived.

It was a defining moment for the local people as it represented the first time that international medical teams could start work immediately within a crisis management system already in place.

Such has been the enthusiasm in Samoa for the success of the Savaai model, that this year two more Primary Trauma Courses (PTC) have been held there to provide further training to a broader range of emergency responders such as fire officers, police and remote clinic nurses.

The wider professional selection was made this year because medical personnel are not always the first on the scene at many accidents, given that Samoa does not have a national ambulance system.

The main course presenters this year were Dr Loudeen Lam and Dr Tapa Fidow, both local surgical registrars, and Dr Bryce Curran, an anaesthetist from New Zealand, with the training provided at the Tuasivi Hospital on Savaii.

The PTC program was developed to provide affordable emergency and trauma skills to health workers in developing countries, presenting similar principles to the Advanced Trauma Life Support (ATLS) program.

Dr Curran said it was particularly effective because the skills taught could be applied to any situation, and any patient, and gave people a common language of emergency response through-out the world.

He said this was his third international trip to teach the course, and his second to Samoa.



"The best part of this education package, is that the PTC combines both knowledge and experience for the participants who get a chance to practice the theory of resuscitation in a range of well-developed scenarios.

"People's imaginations were captured in Samoa by their capacity to cope with the tsunami so this year we provided an hour-long disaster simulation session on how to manage mass casualties."

Dr. Curran said the main techniques presented in the course were in stabilising patients, managing air-ways, breathing and circulation, otherwise known as the ABC of trauma care.

He said that in the absence of a national ambulance service, the transport of trauma patients was mostly undertaken by nursing staff while remote clinic nurses were also frequently the prime responders.

"This year we particularly focussed on their needs in terms of teaching the participants how they can start to treat patients from the minute of their arrival," he said.

"We go into that in great detail; what to look out for, how to treat shock, how to recognise internal bleeding.

"We also looked more broadly at what local disaster management plans might look like.

"Both aspects empower people and give them the skills and the confidence to know they can cope with what can be infrequent but frightening events."

Dr Curran said the PTC course was also of great value in that it encouraged team building and boosted networking opportunities between local health workers in different parts of the country.

"The people of Samoa are fantastic and hugely enthusiastic and keen to learn," he said.

"It's all very well for overseas aid programs to come in and build a hospital or a clinic but education and training are the key and I like being involved in that.

"It's particularly rewarding to help people introduce systems that they can then finesse to fit within their own geographical and social framework like the Samoans did with the Savaai model."

**This year's provision of the PTC course was a joint effort between the College-coordinated Pacific Islands Project (supported by AusAID) and the Health Ministry of Samoa.**