



# International Medical Development

The College is committed to improving international assistance

The design of protocols to allow Trainee surgeons a more effective role in international aid work and the need for more focussed surgical educational packages to be delivered by visiting surgical teams were the major recommendations to come out of the Colleges' second International Medical Development Symposium held in August.

First held in 2006, the symposium is designed to help the College constantly improve its ability to match the assistance provided with the various needs of host nations across the Pacific region.

The College is a major co-ordinator of millions of dollars in AusAid funding, has a strong and central ethos of providing voluntary medical assistance to countries in need. Programs co-ordinated through the College are dedicated to assist East Timor, Papua New Guinea (PNG), the Pacific Islands and Nusa Tenggara Timur.

This year, more than 180 delegates attended the symposium, including representatives from host nations, volunteer surgeons, nurses and allied health professionals. Aimed at building

effective communication systems between host countries and the international aid providers, the symposium allowed host country representatives to explain the type of assistance they saw as most useful as well as providing a forum for volunteer Fellows to pass on the knowledge gained through their international aid work.

Speakers at the meeting included the Honourable Bob McMullan, the Australian Parliamentary Secretary for International Development, Professor Eddie McCaig, Associate Professor of Surgery at the Fiji School of Medicine, Dr Clement Malau, Secretary of Health, PNG and Sir Isi Kevau, Dean of the School of Medicine and Health Science, PNG.

Co-convenor of the meeting Mr Glenn Guest said that while the contribution of Fellows to international aid remained outstanding, constant social and economic shifts within the region meant that practical and effective communication systems remained vital.

"This symposium is very important because both sides involved in the provision

of international medical development need to sit down together and listen to each other. It can be extremely difficult at times to meet the need of individual countries mainly because such needs are constantly evolving – from one nation wanting specialist teams to fly in to conduct specific surgeries to others seeking post-graduate educational assistance - while we have to constantly consider how best to stretch the development dollar as far we can.

"However, the strong turnout at the symposium suggested a great commitment from both sides of the equation to getting it right as often as possible. The meeting was a strong success given the wide variety of host nations represented, the diverse range of speakers sharing their experiences and the great enthusiasm of the surgeons, nurses, anaesthetists and other health professionals dedicated to providing this assistance."

Mr Guest said a central issue that arose from the meeting was the need for enhanced communication between the donors and recipients of medical equipment. He said there now existed at times a poor correlation between



what equipment donors wanted to give and what host nations could sensibly use.

“There have been cases where generous and well-meaning organisations have wanted to provide equipment such as a CT scanner for example to a hospital in the region that does not have the maintenance budget or the technical expertise to keep it running,” Mr Guest said.

“Although a centralised catalogue and warehouse were suggested as an ideal solution, it was recognised that this was an extremely difficult undertaking beyond the scope of the College. However, a set of guidelines from the host nations is achievable and is a practical way of guiding the appropriateness of donated equipment.”

Mr Guest said another central issue raised at the meeting was the strong desire by Australian and New Zealand Trainees to play a larger role in the provision of medical development. He said he would work over the next few months to devise a set of protocols to guide Trainees’ involvement within the framework of the Colleges’ international programs.

“Often Trainees are not given the opportunity to become involved in some of the outreach work provided through the College because host nations frequently want visits by specialists but the trainees are the specialists of tomorrow. We want to catch them when they are young, when they are enthusiastic and before the responsibilities of private practice make it more difficult for them to take time out to travel yet we have to design a system whereby their involvement does not impact on the training of local surgical trainees,” Mr Guest said.

Mr Guest said highlights of the meeting included the strong involvement and enthusiasm of nurses, the presentation and on-going involvement in international development by Professor David Scott, the Medical Director for the Colleges’ East Timor Program, and the contribution made by Professor David Watters, the Medical Director of the Pacific Island Project.

Fellow convenor Associate Profes-

sor Hamish Ewing, who has visited East Timor every year since 2002, said the need to measure the benefit of assistance and to better co-ordinate educational packages had also been central themes of the meeting.

“While there is absolutely no doubt that the voluntary contribution made by Fellows and allied health professionals continues to be outstanding, we are now perhaps at a time where we can and should devise systems so that we know at a glance that we are providing what each host nation wants us to provide while also proving to ourselves and others that what we do is as good as we think it is,” Associate Professor Ewing said.

“I think it is time that we designed a process that can measure the impact of our assistance, that can co-ordinate follow-up research and that can also ensure that the educational component of each team visit is as practical and useful in each particular situation and country as we can make it. For that to work we need to make sure there is effective communication between each host country and each program. We need to collect and analyse data and we need to tailor educational packages.

“A suggestion was made at the symposium that one way to achieve this was for the establishment of an educationalist within the College to design such packages, to co-ordinate the data and to act as a focus between host countries and volunteer surgeons.

“Yet this a complex issue because as with all international aid matters, it comes down to decisions on how the aid dollar is best spent.”

Associate Professor Ewing said, however, that despite the challenges, the symposium demonstrated the on-going enthusiasm of Australian and New Zealand health professionals to provide assistance to those nations in need.

“All the feedback we received suggested that people found the meeting to be rewarding and useful in that it was very interactive, very honest and positive and allowed people to establish useful relationships across professions, specialties and nationalities.”

1. Isi Kevau, Clement Malau, Greg Fernandez, Don Marshall, Ian Gough & Glenn Guest 2. Rowan Nicks & Gordon Low 3. Valerie Remedios & Ruben David 4. Neil Wetzig & Michael Henderson 5. Richard Rawson & Jambi Garap 6. Vince Cousins, Perry Burstin & Malcom Baxter