

## **2016 Tonga Trip Report**

Team Tonga 2016 arrived on the northern island of Vava'u during the monsoon rains of early June. Though ill-equipped for the rain, our group of six were nevertheless excited for the educational and rewarding two weeks that lay ahead.

Our aim was to support the Prince Wellington Ngu Hospital in their efforts to reduce the incidence and impact of non-communicable diseases within the local community. We were able to assist the nurse practitioners at the hospital-based clinic and at a rural outreach clinic, as well as conduct our own free community health screenings around the town of Neiafu. In both roles, we tried to develop an awareness and appreciation for chronic diseases like diabetes and hypertension, as well as to promote healthy living in a culturally-sensitive manner. The locals received us with kindness and patience and were eager to check and discuss their health status with us – I found these interactions (and the insight into Tongan culture they provided) to be the most rewarding part of the trip. Those who had been diagnosed often did not understand the importance of improving their lifestyle, regularly monitoring their disease and complying with their medicine regimes - hopefully we were able to effectively communicate these messages.

Thanks to the generosity of our friends, family and colleagues, we were able to raise over \$3000 for the hospital. With these funds, and with the generous support of Medshop Australia, we procured a large assortment of supplies for use in the hospital's non-communicable diseases clinic; the donations included glucometers, sphygmomanometers, stethoscopes and wound dressings. It was evident that this equipment will help to alleviate some of their resource shortages and will improve the quality of health care available in the NCD clinic. There is also capacity to expand the scope of our donations for use in other parts of the hospital – for example, the surgical, maternity or paediatric wards.

We also had a chance to enjoy the beauty of Tonga and learn about its culture and history. Though at times the trip was somewhat confronting, it is one that I would recommend to anyone that would like to increase their understanding of the health challenges faced by our Pacific neighbours. I am grateful for the opportunity and thoroughly enjoyed being part of TeamTonga 2016.

**Katie Blunt**

### **REFLECTION**

Travelling to Vava'u, Tonga with TeamMED was a once in a lifetime opportunity. It opened my eyes to underdeveloped countries and exposed me to things that put me well outside my comfort zone. Their lifestyle and diets made it easy to understand why non-communicable diseases is their biggest problem. However, their kindness, willingness to learn and gratitude made us feel as though they were willing to improve.

After a few days, I realised that our help wasn't going to make a huge difference. There is still so much more we can do. However, this trip has fuelled a desire within me to stay dedicated to global health and improve the program for next year's students.

**Stephanie Tedesco**