

TEAM MED TONGA TRIP 2017

Location: Neifau, Vava'u, Tonga

Dates: 13th – 24th June 2017

Volunteers:

- Georgia Smith (Year 2A)
- Molly Cargill (Year 2A)
- Madeleine Marsland (Year 4C)
- Rebecca Aitchison (Year 4C)
- Tiffany Tie (BMedSc)



Malo e lelei! In June 2017 we were incredibly lucky to spend 10 days in Vava'u. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as type 2 diabetes mellitus, hypertension and obesity are a huge health burden in Tonga. To target these areas, we engaged in various health promotion activities in the community including running free screening clinics providing blood pressure and random blood glucose levels checks; observing the NCD clinic at the Prince Wellington Ngu Hospital; attending rural outreach visits to small islands with the NCD clinic nurses and doctor; engaging with the local community during their library fundraising fair; a large education session with the youth groups from all the surrounding islands.

These were all fantastic experiences and greatly improved our understanding of the importance of access to healthcare and health literacy. Healthcare in Tonga is vastly different to Australia. We often take blood tests and send them to onsite pathology laboratories in hospitals and receive result in a few hours. In contrast, results may take up to two months to return in Vava'u. Their samples need to be sent to the main island and then offshore again to somewhere like New Zealand to be processed. As a result, treatment may be delayed and patients may forget to follow up with the doctor.

A large component of the Team MED trips is to fundraise and provide material aid to the communities we visit. Thanks to the generous sponsorship and support from Melbourne University Health Initiative (MUHI), and family and friends, we were able to donate a large amount of medical equipment to the hospital, including a nebuliser as requested, and pack 100 first aid kits to give to local families.

We also enjoyed exploring the wonderful island of Vava'u including walking to the top of Mt Talau, swimming in caves, attending Church to hear the Tongan communities' amazing voices, partake in a traditional feast and relax on the gorgeous beaches. Unfortunately we missed the season for swimming with whales (August) – I guess the solution is to go back again!

Malo aupito to everyone who helped us along the way – Steph, Dr John Lee, Dr Vasi, Lois and the NCD Clinic nurses, Don and Nori, Sandra, Marco and most of all, the wonderfully welcoming people of Vava'u!

Tiffany Tie

