

ANZGITA: Chair Report 2023

ANZGITA is now 15 years old. We are a mature organization. Our work in the IndoPacific is highly regarded for the models and principles of training that we espouse and for the skills development of attendees. We continue to attract invitations from countries across the region, especially the Pacific, for our expertise in training in gastroenterology and GI endoscopy. The need for gastroenterological expertise is evident to us wherever we turn across the region. The invitations exceed our human and financial resources to engage, meaning we need to prioritize. This is a major aspect of the work of the Board, in concert with a commitment to our existing partners in Fiji, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tonga and Timor-Leste.

ANZGITA is proud of our programs in-country and through our virtual engagements through webinars and WhatsApp/Viber instant interactions groups, supporting our colleagues. We have learnt from their expertise, clinical practices, and experiences at the same time we have passed on our own skills through in-country programs.

Even before COVID but more so following the pandemic, we have come to appreciate the resourcing challenges beyond developing skilled practitioners that are confronting our partners in delivering services, the demand for which continues to grow everywhere. These challenges always relate to funding of equipment purchases and maintenance, materials for safe endoscopy practice and skilled ancillary staff such as biomedical engineering. Support for our partners in these areas is something that is becoming more than an adjunct to our training work and which the Board is closely monitoring. We have generous supplier partners who continue to assist our in-country partners and with whom we will consult as we investigate further.

A major sponsor that renewed its generous support of our training work in the last year is the JGH Foundation. It has supported us for over five years, enabling us to deliver training to some of our training locations outside Fiji. We consider this is very important, as it is essential to close the loop of training and ensure that the hub training in Fiji is successfully applied as clinical practice in the home countries of trainees and further developed to meet local needs. We look forward to working further in partnership with JGHF given our common goals.

We are grateful for the support of RACS Global Health which this year committed support over the next three years to our hub training program in Fiji. This incorporates the four-week academic and endoscopic training program that attracts physicians and surgeons from across the north and south Pacific. The RACS program funding this work is funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Professor Michael Schultz, our Board member from Dunedin, has been terrific in driving the academic approach to the program in Suva, and coordinating the webinar program. Like us all, Michael has a palpable passion for the work we do as ANZGITA. The personal connections we make with our partners across the region are so important for our understanding of their needs, our shaping of the support we provide, and for the profile of Australia and New Zealand across this geographically competitive region.

Chris Hair has drawn on his relationship with Epworth Medical Foundation in Victoria to develop a wonderful collaboration with it, through the good offices of Mr Scott Bulger, the Foundation's Director. This new initiative is focussed on the TTM Hospital in Samoa, and will be a tripartite partnership between the Foundation, the Samoan MoH and ANZGITA. Initially, the Foundation is committed to supporting the partnership for three years. The collaboration will cover in-country

training, observerships at Epworth facilities and other jointly agreed activities. A truly wonderful partnership for all parties, Epworth, ANZGITA and Samoa.

Invitations keep landing with us: a compelling invitation from the Ministry of Health in Kiribati, an heartfelt invitation to renew our training (for nurses in particular) via the internet for Myanmar, and others from the highlands of PNG and Mongolia. We have a membership of over 200 potential trainers, so we have much of the training capacity required, but we cannot engage without funding support from government or philanthropy. Expansion challenges our program management resources, which are currently pro bono and would also have to change. So, we need help if we are to respond to these approaches that are all in so much need.

ANZGITA is now post COVID. We are back on the ground, training. Our flagship Fiji program in July-August, and although not in the Financial Year reported on here, it is worthwhile noting that it ran well, with a smaller, ideal sized cohort of trainees enabling more concentrated experiential training. Trainees travelled to Suva from a wide area of the Pacific.

We see some remarkable successes by the doctors who have developed their skills under our guidance. For example, we were delighted to see Dr Elizabeth Wore use her skills to retrieve a large coin from the GI tract of a 3-year-old in Honiara: a situation which otherwise would have been fatal or at least require excessively invasive surgery – or an expensive transfer to Australia or New Zealand. A small group of former Fijian trainees are now experts in delivery of endoscopy services and training, including the peak endoscopic expertise of ERCP – the only service in the public sector across the Pacific.

I believe our nurses, lead by Di Jones, have a reputation for delivery of the best training in gastroenterology endoscopy nursing in the developing world. This is reflected in the requests for their expertise coming from centres in developing countries around the world. We are privileged to have Di, Karen Kempin and their many colleagues as part of ANZGITA.

Till mid 2022, we were blessed with the calm and sage approach of Dr Tony Clarke as my deputy and Programs Coordinator. I am so pleased the Dr Robyn Nagel has stepped into his Program Coordinator shoes. The success of the post-COVID programs over the year being reported are in large part due to her diligence in establishing our first full set since the pandemic, and which continues for the remainder of 2023. She has attended many of them herself to build an understanding of the issues confronting our partners and trainers. Assoc Prof Chris Hair continues to be the epitome of all that ANZGITA represents embodied in his wonderful collaborative nature with our colleagues across the Pacific, drawing out the best in trainees, as he engages with them in-country, in webinars and through Viber. Chris has kindly taken up the Deputy Chair position for which I am so grateful.

Mr Frank Eastaughffe, our secretary provides indefatigable time and counsel to ANZGITA and me, as Chair. It is difficult to see how ANZGITA would be the success that it is, without his passion and commitment. And Mr Alan Studley who watches closely over our finances and governance. Thank you, Frank and Alan.

ANZGITA has a major grant application into DFAT around helicobacter antibiotic resistance across the region (important for the region including Australia and New Zealand to understand the development and spread of resistance organisms), and other projects supporting training of senior partners in “sabbaticals” in Victoria and Queensland, including for nurses.

It has been a challenging few years over COVID, but we are through it and on our way. Why not join us if you haven't already? Visit www.anzgita.org

Finlay Macrae AO
Chair