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My Fiji experience with ANZGITA

My first exploit with ANZGITA was in November 2017 which saw me travelling to Yangon, Myanmar to assist in endoscopy training at SanPya hospital.

ANZGITA is the Australian and New Zealand Gastroenterology International Training Association, a volunteer association delivering gastroenterology training programs to doctors and nurses in AsiaPacific with the support of industry, professional groups, donors, governments and other interested parties.

Our trip to Myanmar involved four doctors and six nurses, was two weeks in total and a fantastic experience.

This is not about Myanmar though – it is about Fiji.

Christmas Eve 2019 I received an email from Di Jones asking if I would consider going to Fiji (with ANZGITA) to assist training the nurses in ERCP, and I jumped at the chance. The nurse who had been planning to go to Fiji was unable to go – lucky me.

ERCP was done on Thursdays only as the theatre is of course shared with the surgeons, so this was to be a short, quick trip. It was planned for Thursday the 9th January – only about two weeks to

get the paperwork done, apply for leave and get my head around a trip to Fiji.

I flew out of Brisbane at 10.30 am on Wednesday 8th January, landing in Nadi about three and a half hours later. A quick walk over to the domestic airport to catch the flight to Suva. At the Suva airport I met Dr Sunny Lee, the Brisbane based interventional gastroenterologist leading the ERCP training.

It is a short half hour flight from Nadi to Suva and we landed about 4pm. As Suva is two hours ahead of Brisbane, it was now 6pm local time. The taxi ride along the coast took about an hour – I think the driver wanted to show us as much of Suva as he possibly could – delivering us to the Tanoa Plaza Hotel around 7pm.

At seven am on Thursday morning, Dr Aminiasi Rokocakau collected us from

the hotel. Dr Aminiasi is endoscopy trained and spent a year at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, before returning to Fiji to run the Endoscopy Unit at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital. On the way to the hospital, we stopped at a local pharmacy to collect the anaesthetic drugs we would need for our ERCP cases.

We went straight to the theatre to get into scrubs, set up and get started on the first case. I met the head endoscopy nurse Maraia, Onny (Mereoni) an endoscopy nurse and Pailato, the male nurse that would be assisting at all the procedures. Both Onny and Pailato work in other areas of the hospital, but love endoscopy and are keen to learn anything and everything they can.

I was very surprised that the theatre was so big, modern and well equipped.



It is both rewarding and humbling to work in countries like Myanmar and Fiji and I encourage you to consider participating in the future.



State of the art theatre at Colonial War Memorial Hospital, Suva, Fiji

As endoscopy nurses know, it is always a touch nerve wracking working with a consultant that you have not worked with before, especially with technically difficult procedures like ERCP. Dr Lee was very patient, very skilled and Pailato was much, much better at ERCP than he thought he was. We did not always have the consumable that we wanted so we quickly learnt and adapted to

make do and change our thinking to achieve the outcome we wanted.

We had an anaesthetist present, administering sedation exactly as we do in Australia.

I learnt so much from working with these wonderful nurses. They are incredibly hard working, so keen to learn, exceptionally welcoming and great fun

to be around. We completed two ERCP in the morning session and I think I learnt as much from Pailato as he did from me.

In between cases we discussed all things endoscopy, shared ideas on infection control, emergency cases, consumables and any hints and tips we had learnt. We shared what works and what doesn't. I discovered that Maraia, the head endoscopy nurse, does ALL the after-hours on call – all of it. She is truly amazing.

Lunch was an Indian take away that was very hot and spicy – the staff had been so careful in choosing gluten free foods (I am Coeliac) that I was determined to try absolutely everything offered – I did and It was delicious, even if I was on fire for the next few hours!

After lunch it was back to the theatre for another case. Our case was delayed for several hours for a surgical emergency, so I was treated to a tour of the new part of the hospital (some of it not yet in use) and then spent time with Maraia in the cleaning room.

The hospital is an amazing mixture of modern and third world. The endoscopy nurses are very knowledgeable and appreciate



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the help, guidance and support offered by the volunteers. They work long hours and are endlessly patient.

Our last case of the day was difficult and took longer than expected. By the time we had finished our case, changed out of scrubs, and had spoken to the patients awaiting procedure next day, it was 7 pm.

I was very sad to say goodbye to this wonderful group of people so soon – Dr Lee would be back Friday morning to do more cases, but I was flying home at 6 am Friday morning as planned. Weary but exhilarated.

Dinner was at the Country Club but as my taxi was collecting me at 4 am, I left the doctors to carry out the post-mortem of the day and I was early to bed.

I arrived home at midday on Friday 10th January. Not long after, Covid -19 hit and overseas travel ground to a complete halt. I am so very grateful that I took the opportunity to go to Fiji with ANZGITA. It is both rewarding and humbling to work in countries like Mynmar and Fiji and I encourage you to consider participating in the future.

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Still happy after a long day in Theatre. From left to right: Mereoni Ramoce (Onny), Pailato Matanawa, and Dr Sunny Lee



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