

## Pacific Society of Anaesthetists Annual Conference 2022

# Resilience and Recovery

*Dr Aidan McGrinder, Advanced Trainee, Auckland  
Dr Charlotte Legge, Advanced Trainee, Wellington  
& Trainee representative of NZSA Global Health Committee (GHC)*

The Pacific Society of Anaesthetists (PSA) 31st annual refresher course was held on Fiji's beautiful Coral Coast from September 26-30. After a two-year hiatus, the PSA returned to bring together friends and colleagues from all over the Pacific for a five day gathering focused on 'resilience and recovery' in the wake of COVID-19. Historically, the conference has served as an important opportunity for pacific anaesthetists to gather, share knowledge, reconnect with old friends and meet new colleagues and PSA 2022 was certainly no exception.

Dr Sereima Bale opened day one with a truly stirring address where she urged all her Pacifica colleagues to "lead from the front" and become active advocates for safe anaesthesia and healthcare in our home countries. Dr Bale is somewhat of an anaesthesia icon in the Pacific, having played an instrumental role in establishing the postgraduate anaesthesia training programme at Fiji National University (FNU) in 1986. To date, this programme has produced over 100 clinicians with either a Diploma (one year postgraduate study) or Masters (four years postgraduate study) in Anaesthesia who have significantly bolstered the anaesthesia workforce capacity in the Pacific. It is incredible to think that a large number of our Pacific colleagues in attendance at the PSA have been taught by Dr Bale during her time as an Assistant Professor of Anaesthesia at CWMHS in Suva. Dr Bale's contribution to the pacific was acknowledged internationally in 2020 when she was awarded the World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists (WFSA) Distinguished Service award. This award



Dr Sereima Bale receiving a salusalu after her opening address



Delegates of PSA 2022 (the largest ever)

was finally presented to her in-person at the PSA conference dinner.

The current WFSA president Dr Wayne Morriss opened day two highlighting the surgical backlogs created by the pandemic worldwide as a significant threat to health, particularly in low-middle income countries (LMICs). Dr Morriss spent two years teaching at FNU in the early 2000s and is a frequent flyer at the PSA, it is exciting to have Australasia so strongly represented on the WFSA.

The overwhelming message from our Pacific colleagues was the lack of human resource that currently exists in health and the work still required to create a resilient and sustainable anaesthesia workforce. The Solomon Islands (population ~720,000) currently have only three SMO anaesthetists, with one due to retire in the near future. Sadly, this figure falls well short of five physician anaesthetists per 100,000 population; one of the core indicators for monitoring universal access to safe, affordable surgical and anaesthesia care set out by the Lancet Commission on Global Surgery in 2015. Our very own Dr Alan Goodey (Te Whatu Ora Waikato) also highlighted the importance of the anaesthetic assistant in the provision of safe anaesthesia and the extremely limited number of trained anaesthetic assistants that exist in the pacific currently. In 2019, he coordinated the first Pacific Anaesthetic Assistants course and as this continues to develop it will without doubt be an invaluable contribution to the Pacific.

The country updates from Kiribati, Solomons, Tuvalu, Cook Islands, Samoa, Timor Leste, Vanuatu and Tonga were a real highlight. Clinicians from these island nations shared some interesting local cases, like a patient who required awake fiberoptic intubation after suffering a nasty neck wound from a run-in with a saltwater crocodile. COVID-19 and



Pacific Delegates including Dr Cecilia Vaai-Bartley from Samoa (second from left) – current PACT scholarship recipient

the local response to the pandemic was an obvious subject for discussion and we were struck by just how instrumental anaesthesia trainees were in the planning and response of some countries. In contrast, NZ anaesthesia trainees were relatively sheltered from managing COVID-19 patients and certainly were not involved in any higher-level logistical planning, so this highlighted the importance of trainees in the workforce.

A particularly hot topic was ‘PPE and Heat Stress’ presented by Prof Dianne Stephens, an intensivist in the Northern Territory who became the Deputy Chief Health Officer and CMO of Quarantine Health Facilities in 2020. Her research project investigating the impact of heat stress amongst the PPE-clad quarantine facility workers at Howard Springs



Dr Charlotte Legge, Dr Emily Fuakilu and the beautiful Pacific Ocean

and subsequent strategies for risk mitigation was fascinating. If only our research projects resulted in the introduction of anaesthesia department slushy machines! Her

publication titled ‘Heat Health Management in a Quarantine and Isolation Facility in the Tropics’ is free-to-access and makes for some interesting reading.

The group well-being session highlighted the challenges that Pacific anaesthetists face everyday in the provision of safe anaesthesia. Their sense of community, professionalism and faith are the obvious drivers for their tireless dedication to their work but chronic resource shortages (both human and material) means that burnout is a real threat to both individual health and national workforce resilience. Dr Christian Leepo from Vanuatu aptly stated that it is people, and not ‘stuff’ that the Pacific anaesthesia workforce needs. This was in response to Vanuatu receiving 15 donated ventilators at the start of the pandemic, despite not having enough sufficiently trained nurses or doctors to support 15 ventilated patients at once. It is evident that supporting initiatives that bolster the workforce through local training and education are the most beneficial.

The other major wellbeing session was the course dinner which presented a great opportunity to mingle in an informal setting. As the night wore on, the course moved onto the dancefloor and karaoke lounge where it soon became evident that our hard-working Pacific colleagues know how to play hard too!

Four New Zealand anaesthesia trainees attended the PSA this year and we hope this number will continue to grow in years to come. For anyone interested in attending an exciting and extremely varied international conference, we would highly



FAST scan USS workshop

endorse the PSA as a chance to learn more about anaesthesia provision and workforce in the Pacific, meet new colleagues and soak up the warmth of the Pacific and its community. Finally, we would like to extend our sincere thanks to the NZSA and Global Health Committee for supporting us via the trainee travel grant.