1 Year On...

It is 1 year since Vanuatu closed its borders to protect itself from Covid 19 and to this day they remain closed with no real end in sight. Border closures have certainly results in 0 community transmission of Covid and only 3 cases recorded in quarantine. It has been a success in preventing Covid coming into the country but most definitely at a cost economically which in turn has impacted on the health of the country with significant shortages in supplies and personnel. It was 1 year ago that Medical Santo where I work went from 5 health practitioners to myself in the course of a day. Who would have though 1 year on we would still be fighting and feeling the impact of Covid in so many different ways. However like each and every one of you we face each day and do the best we can in whatever circumstance or situation we encounter. There have been joys with the sorrows in each of our lives I am sure and we must persevere and continue to be a light and help those around us. That is my heart anyways.

Medical Santo

Life in the clinic continues on despite the circumstances around us. I have Rachel a midwife/nurse who works 2 days a week with us and thankfully Dr Trelly is still with us whilst he awaits his visa to Australia. He continues to be a blessing to the clinic with his knowledge and expertise. He loves to do procedures and can do light aesthetics. The coconut grapevine here has spread this news near and far so many are coming wanting or needing some minor procedures done. It is great to be able to help in this way those who would not be able to receive this care otherwise.

The clinic is very busy. We do have an on call service which is normally shared between the volunteer doctors and myself but as we have none at the moment it has meant that I have been 'on call' every day for a year now! Thankfully rarely get called on a week night and at weekend usually on 1 or 2 patients. However it has meant that I have not had a day off really in over a year as even over Christmas and New Year was busy with patients. This is taking its toll on me but I know that I am needed here and is where God has me for now and He will and does give strength for each day.

Our role here is also to support the local hospital which we do in different ways - through personnel, medications and supplies. The impact of border closures has meant container ships are much more infrequent and thus medical supplies much more limited. We get most of our medications and dressings from Australia but due to flight/cargo restrictions we don't get them very often. This has meant we have run out of dressings for wounds and medications at times and have had to be creative in how we treat people. This short supply is even worse at the hospital and we have been a source of many medications, gauze, bandages, betadine, ECG dots etc for them. The hospital and therefore Santo the island I work has had no working xray for nearly 2 years now. Last month their ultrasound machine also broke down. Now this is the only hospital in the biggest populated island in Vanuatu with now no working xray or ultrasound where they see very ill patients and do surgeries. Thankfully just over 1 year ago we were donated 2 small ultrasound machines and so we have be able to lend/donate one up to the hospital for their use. It was put to work straight away to diagnose 2 ectopic pregnancies and 3 appendicitis's in 3 kids. Most likely it will be 2 years before they get a new one unless we find one for them. They one we gave is really old and not that great so we are trying to source another for them. If any one of you know of a hospital or clinic upgrading or replacing their ultrasound machines and would be willing to donate to us to give to the hospital that would be fantastic and please let me know. It needs to be a portable one - not too big. The other ultrasound machine we have we use in the clinic and has been extremely handy.

Patient Stories

I thought I would give you a couple stories about some patients. One is a young man who came to us last year with a very swollen infected leg. We did one of our now frequent procedures of sedation, excision and drainage. He had an extensive infection which had eaten away much of his muscle calf to knee. He was an unknown diabetic and if he had left it another week he would have lost his leg. We drained so much pus from his leg and he came to us for many months to change his dressing and clean his leg wound. His wound finally healed last month. He stopped one of our staff in the street the other day to say that he was so grateful to us at the clinic and that his leg infection has turned his life around. He said all he used to think about was himself and work. He didn't care about his wife or new born baby. He would work, drink kava every night and then come home and beat his wife. Coming to the clinic, talking with us and seeing how we treated him and others and spoke with him he felt God speaking to him about his life and how he was living it all wrong. He has reconnected with God, no longer beats his wife, or drinks kava, is back in church and spends time with his family. He knows that God used his leg infection to bring him back to Him. I was so happy when I heard that and what God had done in his life and the small part we played to help show him God's love - just by being a light, being kind and showing love.

Samuel is an ongoing story which we have yet to see the end of.
He is a 2 year old boy with a significant growth in his ear which has now spread through his mastoid bone to the base of his skull. It is likely non malignant and has not spread into his brain yet. It is an operable condition which would save his life. This surgery can not be done here in Vanuatu. Normally pre border closures we could arrange surgery for him in NZ or Australia but this is not easy or feasible at them moment. We have spoken to the paediatric doctors in Vila about what is possible currently. There is a possibility of surgery in Fiji however with border closures we need permission from all the doctors in Vila and then the Government disaster committee and then the government to get him there. There is a lot of politics involved which we are struggling with at the moment. There is a time crunch with this kid and we are pushing as much as we can to get a road approved for this boy. We need a miracle and those all you who are prayers please pray that each person that we need to get permission and approval from will have their heart moved and see the urgency of the situation. Kids with similar conditions last year have died already due to lack of action.

Wounds

Wound care is an ongoing stable of what we do in the clinic. I have trained a local nurse assistant in wound care and it is pretty much her full time job now. We are known for taking on wounds from the impossible to the smallest scratch and everything between. We are seeing a lot of YAWS at the moment and now have treatment and what dressing work down pat. We are having a lot of success in treating wounds even major diabetic feet and wounds that is almost beyond hope. I have learned to wield that surgical blade quite well and frequently now. However sometimes it is too extensive and amputation is needed. Sometimes the patient leaves it too late and we have had a couple pass away from necrotic legs that turn septic or have gone into renal failure. I never promise patients I had fix there big wounds but say I will try. I have a man that currently has extensive gangrene in his leg that needs an above knee amputation but the hospital has refused due to his anesthetic risk. He will die from his wound and renal failure but wife brought him to us to help 'clean' his wound because it smells! It really does. So I did an extensive debridement and his whole leg was pus+++ . His foot is beyond hope and already black and cold. However the aim is palliative management of his leg to make him more comfortable and teach his wife to manage it until time he passes away. His wife did her first dressing on Friday so will see how she went next week.

As you can imagine seeing up to 15 patients a day needing wound care we do go through lots and lots of dressings. We are really running short. As many of you are nurses you probably know that these dressing like silver, aquacel, zinc bandage, honey etc are not cheap. We are having to raise extra funds to cope with the increased demand for wound care we have here. If any of you would like to donate to this or have access to left over dressings or expired dressings or ones not being used please do collect them and send them to me. I know how much we throw away in hospitals and clinics - open a pack, take what we need and throw the rest away. If you could keep the dressing you are about to throw away and send it to me I will absolutely use it! If anyone can help with this please let me know. Thanks

Praise Points

- Dr Trelly is still with us and all his expertise
- Many wounds healed
- Being able to help out the hospital with their critical needs
- The many patients we see each day
- Strength God gives me every day
- Being in a place where God can use me and is much needed

Prayer Points

- Our new truck is in Santo but we are still awaiting the government to release paperwork for us to actually have the truck
- A way to get Samuel the surgery he needs
- Wound care supplies for us
- An ultrasound for the hospital
- A technician to install the xray in the hospital
- Medications we need
- **Urgent Need: Staff and volunteers for the clinic - if you are a doctor, nurse or clinic manager or know one that is and who lives in NZ or Australia and have 4-6 months or more available we are in real need of you. We have volunteer positions available and paid ones with Australian Volunteers International. Please pray and let me know if interested, wanting more info or know of others that might be.**

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