

Blogs from the Waikato District Health Board team in Samoa

The team for Samoa left Waikato Hospital at 7.30pm on Saturday for Whenuapai to catch the NZ Airforce flight, which was also taking NZ Police and dogs, NZ Navy divers and NZ Army. John Key arrived from Samoa on a flight just before we left so we got a farewell speech from him.



Alan Goodey at Whenuapai with MOH issued black T shirts. Great in the heat of Samoa!

Today was a long hot day. We arrived in Samoa at 6.30am, waited two hours for the equipment to be taken off the plane, and then subsequently lost. Two of us stayed behind to try to locate this equipment, which involved driving up and down the tarmac looking left and right for approaching aircraft. Apparently, okay as long as you have your hazard lights on. Security watched us the whole time, but didn't do a thing.



Ralph van Dalen checking supplies on arrival at Samoa.

We then drove for an hour to the hospital with all our supplies and a briefing of questionable significance and limited understanding on our behalf. Then we had a second meeting with the Australian contingent who have been here for the last 48 hours. There are three parts to their contingent, one of who got here 18 hours after the tsunami and dealt with early trauma and the other two arriving a day later.



The girls nearing the end of a long day! l-r Debbie Ratima, Barbara Roberts and Andrea Jarocki.

One located in Apia Hospital and the other undertaking peripheral

assessment and treatment (two teams of approx 60 people including surgeons, ED docs and nurses, paediatricians, search and rescue types). We have been very impressed with the Australian response and it is something we could perhaps aspire to. In saying that, us arriving three days later was all part of the plan, hopefully resulting in a smooth transition. More will be required in the coming weeks, with further soft tissue injuries and complications expected to present. At this stage, 30 tsunami related presentations to ED are occurring on top of the standard day-to-day trauma. We are hoping to get four theatres running in the next day or two.

First impressions with landing were “what tsunami?” with beautiful landscape and beaches and everything seemingly business as usual. But this quickly changed with arriving at the hospital and coming across six or seven containers, which are apparently filled with bodies.

Jason, Debbie, April, Ralph, Alan, John, Janine, Barbara, Andrea, Chris (Auck orthopod)



Shine a light! Jason Donovan helping out in theatre.

Day Two

Well, it started a bit slow, but once we warmed up it was humming. First off, a large combined surgical ward round occurred, while the girls sorted out the ton of gear brought over on our flight. The ward round was mainly logistical, sorting out a very basic priority list. Into operating theatre at 10am, with four theatres running non-stop until 6pm, resulting in a total of 27 cases being pushed through. Probably a record for Samoa, but that's what happens when you have five anaesthetists, 14 nurses, and 12 surgeons all vying for attention.



Actually worked out very well, as we managed to make a dent in a sizeable back log, and it allowed the kiwis to observe for a bit and then progressively take over (mainly to show the Aussies the proper way to do things).



Anaesthetist John Smithells.

It also worked well as it meant the plastic surgeons could roam and organise a plan for them for the next few days, and that multiple wounds could be dealt with on the same person at the same time (a common scenario). It did result in some unusual situations though; an ortho surgeon holding the torch and directing while the colo-rectal surgeon debrided an ankle wound; ketamine being the main anaesthetic used due to non-working anaesthetic machines; a general surgeon seeking direction from, and listening to, an ortho surgeon; a plastic surgeon being available when wanted; and Debbie Ratima doing some work. All in all a satisfying day. Plenty more to do though, with most of it plastics and ortho.

Anyway, this is a message for Dr Cam Buchanan, its as warm as a vets right arm.....



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