

## **ROYAL AUSTRALIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS:**

### **GLOBAL HEALTH PROGRAM FOR PICTS**

#### **SUMMARY**

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) is committed to supporting safe surgical and anaesthetic care across the Pacific. RACS recognises that investing in clinician's education is essential to increasing access to healthcare in Pacific Island countries and meeting the ongoing needs of Pacific communities.

A skilled workforce is the backbone of every health system, yet the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates there is a shortage of 17 million health care workers globally.

[A 2020 mid-term review](#) of the Pacific Island Program (PIP) highlighted that Pacific surgeons are more likely to be able to access specialist training through external providers and programs, such as those that RACS implements, other allied health and nursing practitioners lack access to similar training and education. This inevitably weakens the ability of Pacific surgeons to translate their specialist training into patient care through critical pre and post-operative care predominantly undertaken by the nursing workforce.

In response to these findings, and in discussion with SPC, Pacific Islands Operating Room Nursing Association (PIORNA) and country ministries, RACS Global Health has further focused support to the perioperative nursing cohort across the PICTs. This has included the offer of 25 student places in the postgraduate certificate in perioperative nursing at the Australian College of Nursing. A weekly mentorship program providing support to the students through expert nursing educators. Support to and funding for the completion of the Pacific Perioperative Practice Standard's and the development of these into an online education course as resource for the region.

## **1. BACKGROUND**

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) has been implementing the Pacific Islands Program (PIP) since 1995 to address gaps in specialised clinical service provision in the Pacific. The PIP is funded to deliver a range of tertiary health services and training activities at the request of Pacific Ministries of Health with the objective ‘to strengthen and consolidate specialised clinical service delivery in the Pacific region’. The PIP aims to achieve the following program outcomes:

1. Prioritised Pacific specialised clinical service professionals have improved competencies,
2. Pacific Island Countries receive quality visiting medical teams that meet their priority clinical and training needs,
3. Pacific Ministries of Health better identify and prioritise specialised clinical service and training needs, to inform Ministry of Health planning,
4. Pacific specialised clinical education institutions and Pacific professional clinical organisations have better educational resources.

The current phase of this program is now in its final year of implementation with a new design phase commencing for the next iteration of the program over the next 6 months. RACS Global Health is currently in discussions with DFAT to enable the next phase of funding of this critical program. A collaborative design process with key national partners will be planned and implemented to ensure that the next phase of the program aligns with Pacific partner priorities.

## **2. PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

### **2.1 COVID Surge Support in Fiji**

The RACS Global Health team have recently responded to a request from the Fiji Ministry of Health to provide COVID surge support to the Colonial War Memorial and Lautoka Hospitals. RACS mobilized and deployed a team of six specialist volunteers, including 2 anaesthetists, 1 intensivist, 2 ICU nurses and 1 IPC nurse. This was a successful trip with lots of opportunities for learning. Feedback from the reports submitted by the team was that the ICU nurses particularly in Lautoka could benefit from further training. RACS will work with SPC and ministries to further discuss the possibilities in continuing to upskill nurses in ICU procedures.

## 2.2 Midterm review

In 2020, RACS engaged the Nossal Institute for Global Health at the University of Melbourne to undertake an independent [Mid-Term Review \(MTR\)](#) of the PIP. Following completion of the MTR, RACS has developed a [learning paper](#) to ensure that significant learnings from the review continue to inform RACS Global Health strategy and program development.

## 2.3 Supporting perioperative nurses across the region

In collaboration with SPC and our experienced nursing educators, we are continuing to support the perioperative nurses across the Pacific through a number of streams that will contribute to their practice and leadership in strengthening systems, protocols and safety across their hospitals. These include:

1. **Postgraduate Certificate in Perioperative Nursing** - RACS has funded 25 places for Pacific nurses to undertake an online **Postgraduate Certificate in Perioperative Nursing** through the Australian College of Nursing (ACN) as well as providing further **weekly online mentoring**, tutoring and resources such as textbooks to the nurses to assist in successful completion of their studies.

The nurses are nearing the end of their second term through completion of the subject, *Practice and Philosophy of Perioperative Nursing*. This marks the halfway point in their study towards their qualification. Whilst there have been many challenges, they continue to turn up each week to the additional mentoring and tutor sessions that RACS provides. These sessions have become a great place of discussion and opportunity to share experiences of translating the theory they are learning through the course, into practice in their own hospitals.

2. **Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs), Perioperative Standards Manual** (previously known as Pacific Perioperative Practice Bundles (PPPB)) - This has been a large piece of work over many years between SPC, Pacific Island Operating Room Nurses Association (PIORNA) and nursing educators, Sally Sutherland-Fraser and Menna Davies. RACS Global Health has supported this work over the last few years and is pleased to see the excellent progress towards completion of the standards that will be published and distributed later this year.
3. **Development of the Online Module of PICTs Perioperative Standards** - RACS in collaboration with Interplast have been supporting the developed of the standards into online training modules that will establish an educational learning resource for the

standards in care and patient safety across the Pacific. The online modules that will be produced are a self-paced training based that will predominantly be used for nurses entering operating theatres for the first time, as a refresher training for nurses in operating theatre and potentially other clinical staff working in the operating theatre environment.

Further information on current activities and achievements can be found in our latest [newsletter](#)

### 3. CHALLENGES

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact significantly on the Pacific Island activities. Responding to the pandemic and the changed conditions has required a significant and ongoing shift in PIP programming, in order to continue to provide training, mentoring and support to Pacific health staff despite travel and quarantine restrictions. There is still not clarity around when full international travel to the Pacific will be able to proceed, and PIP planning has proceeded on the basis that the majority of planned VMT visits will not recommence until 2022.

For the nurses entering this course there have been some key areas that have been challenging, some that have been smoothed out over the term and others we know will be a constant challenge we will need to work with. .

**Accessing stable internet**, computers, and printing services. Many students only have access to there phone and require the use of a computer at the hospital or library to be able to complete their studies. The students that have continued into term 2 have been able to find access to devices and internet connection issues have established for most. However, we are aware for this in some of the smaller islands this can still present a challenge. Where possible we have tried to provide important resources sent via email however as this is an online course most content requires significant access.

**Support from nursing unit manager** for study leave was another category that students felt they had difficulties in. We have encouraged them to talk to their managers where possible when study becomes stressful and they need leave to complete assessments. This may also be mitigated by facilitation of a session at the beginning of each term to ensure all parties are aware of the expectations for the terms work.

After the first term 70% of students indicated that they needed more supported with their **writing skills**. It is a challenging course at a postgraduate level and requires high level of academic skills. Based on this feedback RACS, SPC and nursing educators Sally Suther-and Fraser and Menna Davies have shifted the focus of the weekly mentoring webinars to include more time spent on writing skills,

referencing and construction of essays. Already there is a huge improvement in the work that is being submitted.

#### **4. FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

It is hoped that the nurses who complete this course will be able to shift into a mentorship role for younger nurses entering the perioperative environment. RACS will continue to work with SPC and PHON to develop the skills and opportunities for perioperative nurses in the region through online training, collaboration with tertiary educational institutions in the Pacific and further work with the Australian nurse educators.