

Orthopaedic training proposal for the Pacific Islands

Background

The Pacific Islands Orthopaedic Association (**PIOA**) is based in the Solomon Islands, a group of islands with 600,000 people located in the South Pacific ocean 3 hours flying time north east of Brisbane, Australia.

In 1993 Dr **Hermann Oberli** signed an MOU with the Solomon Islands government to provide orthopaedic services to the Solomon Islands. At the time there were no specialist orthopaedic services for this large population. There was a significant need due to a large trauma load with many patients left with untreated deformity and many patients with congenital conditions (such as club foot). Substantial funding for this was provided by "Medizin im Südpazifik" (South Pacific Medical Projects) from Switzerland.

Dr Oberli then negotiated with **Orthopaedic Outreach** (the humanitarian arm of the Australian Orthopaedic Association (AOA)) to provide training to Solomon Island doctors. Orthopaedic Outreach organised a Diploma program in Orthopaedic Surgery (Pacific). This was based in Fiji. 11 candidates from Fiji and 2 others in Solomon Islands (Dr Silent and Dr. Patrick) and PNG were trained. This programme was suddenly ceased in 2001 when 2 graduates from Fiji broke their training agreements and came to work with Queensland Health. Because of the breaking of their agreements with the AOA the Pacific diploma was closed. This left other affected candidates in limbo.

An alternative model was then tried by Dr Oberli seeking to provide hands on training for one Solomons doctor per year for 3-6 months in Switzerland. While helpful, this did not provide experience in conditions common in the Pacific. The other risk has been that candidates who train in Australia or New Zealand or Switzerland rarely return to their home countries to serve. Dr. Patrick is one of the few exceptions. To date there is still no alternative pure orthopaedic training program in the Pacific Islands. Of the 11 candidates trained in Fiji only 2 are still working in Fiji.

Current orthopaedic services:

At present orthopaedic services throughout the Pacific have a variable quality. Overall the South Pacific has a population of 10 million. This includes Papua New Guinea (7 million people), Fiji (700,000 people), Solomon Islands (600,000 people) and a number of smaller countries (Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu, Cook Islands, Nauru, Federated States of Micronesia etc).

Solomon Islands provides probably the best orthopaedic service and has certainly been the most consistent service over the last 15 years. However there are significant ongoing issues. Delay in presentation is common after trauma. Commonly patients seek traditional healers or delay coming to the capital Honiara (where the orthopaedic service is located) because they lack the resources or have no family support in the city. Even after presentation at the National Referral Hospital there is often a delay in proceeding with appropriate surgical treatment due to lack of access to an operating list and implants. Sometimes this delay is also due to lack of experience and skill among the more junior staff who fail to see the priority of the need for treatment. This program aims to increase the clinical skills and help the local orthopaedic staff to provide quality orthopaedic care and become effective advocates for their patients.

Aims:

This program aims to provide a training route for those doctors wishing to train as an orthopaedic

surgeon and serve their communities in the Pacific. An association named the Pacific Islands Orthopaedic association (PIOA) has been established with the support of Orthopaedic Outreach. Orthopaedic Outreach has been involved in providing training in South East Asia and the Pacific for the last 30 years. PIOA has been established in the Solomon Islands because of support from the National Referral Hospital, Honiara and the Ministry of Health, Solomon Islands. The National Referral Hospital has one of the few functioning specialist orthopaedic services in the Pacific Islands. It has provided a continuous orthopaedic service for more than 15 years.

The training program is however open to citizens of all the Pacific Island nations. The association has been accepted as a member of the Asia Pacific Orthopaedic Association (APOA). The APOA is the umbrella body of orthopaedic associations and comprises members from countries from South Asia through South East Asia and the Pacific. The PIOA is also affiliated with the AOA.

Accreditation:

The PIOA training program is currently being assessed by the **International College of Surgeons**. It is expected that graduates of the PIOA training program will become Fellows of the ICS. Certification by ICS will confirm that the training programme offered by PIOA meets an internationally accepted bench mark standard for a specialist orthopaedic surgeon. It does not however imply automatic acceptance by local licensing authorities in any particular jurisdiction. The acceptance of this or any other qualification is the role of the local regulatory authorities (Ministry of Health) in each jurisdiction.

The PIOA is also seeking to affiliate with **Queensland University of Technology (QUT)** for accreditation of the course to be awarded as an Extended Masters level course in Orthopaedic Surgery.

The Program:

The training program will run over **4 years**. The course will be delivered in **twelve live-in modules** each lasting two weeks which are compulsory. That is there would be 3 modules each year held in **February, June and October for 4 years**. In addition candidates would be provided with web based learning materials related to each module to enable them to prepare prior to coming for the live in module. A detailed curriculum is available The live-in modules would be held at the Training Centre, **National Referral Hospital, Honiara, Solomon Islands**. This would equate to 24 weeks of face to face contact teaching time. In addition candidates would have supervised practicums which would be carried out by visiting teams (some funded by RACS-PIP and by Orthopaedic Outreach) who already visit many of the Pacific islands for provision of orthopaedic clinical services between 1 and 4 times a year. This would provide the additional mandatory 12 weeks of contact time over the 4 years.

Courses would be taught initially by **volunteer surgeons from Australia, New Zealand and Switzerland providing their time and experience pro bono**. Orthopaedic Surgeons with an interest in teaching in the Pacific would be welcome to help. Further clinical supervision would be carried out by visiting RACS Pacific Islands Project and other teams and existing local clinicians. Examinations would be conducted by guest examiners from the AOA. In addition candidates would spend some time (3-6 months) in a post outside their home territory to gain further clinical experience in elective orthopaedics. The course would be based at the National Referral Hospital, Honiara. They have access to an existing excellent training conference room with data projector. It is proposed to purchase training models to assist in the setting up of skills workshops for practical skills based training. It is expected that candidates would complete a **major research project** as part of the course.

The PIOA course is now far more significant and thorough than the initial vision for training identified by Dr Oberli. It will provide a lasting legacy for the people of the South Pacific as for the first time there will be local orthopaedic surgeons trained who can form the nucleus of a self governing, self sufficient orthopaedic association.

The costs of the programme will be \$40,000 per Solomons candidate and \$A70,000 per other Pacific Islands candidate (includes airfares and accommodation for each module) over 4 years. **The cost for the initial intake of 7 candidates (3 SI, 4 other) will be \$A400,000 over 4 years.**