

"He no walk so good." An apt, honest and Tongan description by a woman whose barn door-sized husband was slowing down far too much for her liking. His non-united proximal femoral fracture may have been part of the reason, but in a country with one X ray machine, no orthopaedic surgeons and not a nail in sight, the woman's disapproval of her husband's extreme apathy may well have been appropriate.

Led by Dr Mark Ridalgh, the Outreach team comprising Dr Bruce Caldwell, Dr Rod Green, Dr Georgia Stefanko and the Greek Goddesses, Connie Tryfon and Penny Dalgitou, spent the best part of a week in Tonga's Vaiola Hospital.

A flurry of emails before the trip had prepared us for the inevitable labyrinth of pathology awaiting our arrival. A traumatic hip dislocation in seven year old Lupe, who, after being struck by a tractor several months before, limped into our clinic from one of the outer islands. After an attempt at traction and closed reduction, we were able to successfully reduce the child's hip with an open reduction and broomstick plaster, fashioned from one of the hospital's prized mops that had been unceremoniously sacrificed in the work shed of the hospital.

The case of twenty-two year old Steven, who limped into clinic with a healed scar over his right thigh. The history was that several months before he was robbing a house in which the occupant took umbrage and shot him in the leg, peppering his thigh with shotgun pellets. He escaped with his life but subsequently sustained a pathological fracture through his femoral shaft whilst playing rugby..... three weeks after the incident.

ACL reconstructions, shoulder stabilizations, ankle fusions, HTOs and a smattering of trauma continued through the week. After thirty-three operated cases and over 250 health professional hours, the resilience and affect of these people never ceased to amaze us. Coming from a world where health care is thought of as a right, where if a screw doesn't fit we take another, it was sobering and uplifting to experience the gratitude extended to the team during our time there, in a place where health care is beyond a luxury. Personally, it gave me an opportunity to reflect on our approach to our system..... a system that is maligned, ridiculed and berated. Despite its failings, we will truly never know how good we have it.

I would like to extend my personal gratitude to Stryker for the privilege and opportunity to travel with the orthopaedic team and the involved medical industry for its ongoing support of Orthopaedic Outreach in such difficult times for all. The people of Tonga and our team thank you.

Jai Kumar.