

Hearts4Kids 2024 Newsletter

Dear supporters

It is about a month since we all set off for Fiji to start the 2024 Surgical Visit, but we had been hearing lots about the children and babies from Dr Maryanne Koraai as she had been preparing them for surgery since their arrival in Suva the previous week.

When we arrived at Sanjeevani Hospital on Wednesday July 24th we were introduced to 16 children and their parents, one by one, and looked at their echocardiograms and data before confirming that they were suitable to proceed to surgery. One Fijian child was on standby, but they were safe to wait for the next team in September.

You could see already that the families had become friends and some of the toddlers were enjoying cuddles from the two teenagers in the group, even though they came from different Pacific Island countries and spoke different languages.

This trip was exciting because for the first time we were aiming to do children from several countries, not just Fiji, some of which (Solomon Islands and Kiribati) have had very limited access to children's cardiac surgery until now. The Pasifika Medical Association group, an NGO funded via MFAT (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade), enabled this to happen using a multiskilled Pasifika team and with the benefit of close links already forged with other Pacific countries.

A 10 year old boy called George from Samoa was born with Tetralogy of Fallot which meant he was blue and was gradually getting more breathless over the past few years. He was quietly spoken before the operation and quite frightened I think, but after he came through his surgery safely and was discharged out to the motel he let us know that he wanted to be a doctor when he grew up. You can see the photo of him listening to his own heart with a stethoscope, getting his first lesson!



Two toddlers, one from Vanuatu and the other from the Solomon Islands, became best friends. They were so busy playing together they didn't seem to be sore and it was pure entertainment for all of us just to watch them bossing each other about.

Of course Dr Maryanne had managed to find us a couple of extra babies at the last minute who really needed doing promptly. One was Talicia, from Suva, only 3 months old and very beautiful but breathless and unable to gain much weight as she was breathing so hard. After her VSD (hole in the heart) closure she made a good recovery and by the time she went home her breathing had returned to normal. At follow-up clinic she was getting chubby cheeks and had gained half a kilo in just a couple of weeks!



The other, Berenadeta, was quite blue and listless, and was on full medical treatment but in danger as the weeks went by. It was not certain if she would be operable by the time the next team arrived so we fitted her operation in alongside the other children. She stayed longer in Intensive Care than the others but steadily recovered with wonderful care from our combined New Zealand and Fijian team of nurses. She earned herself the nickname of 'angry bird' though we think her attitude was a good thing, she fought her way through!



It was wonderful to have the support of Fijian nurses at Sanjeevani Hospital, including Vara, who scrubbed up for me in the operating room and did an excellent job there. We also enjoyed having visiting nurses from Vanuatu and Kiribati and Dr Farah from Samoa, who took part in the clinical care of these children from their respective countries and will give them ongoing follow-up. We hope they will be able to describe what the hospital stay is like and reassure future families that they will be cared for and kept safe during the trip to Suva.

All the children and babies are now ready for home and flights are being organised to get them back. Most of them are no longer in need of medicines and can expect to live and be looked after in the same way as a normal child from this point on. This photo was taken at their last clinic visit - expressing their huge thanks for what we have achieved together, and they are all now safely home.



So our thanks to our supporters, as well as Sanjeevani Hospital and Pasifika Medical Association.

Bula Vinaka

From the Hearts4Kids team