



InterplastTM

Repairing bodies & rebuilding lives
in the Asia Pacific region

**INTERPLAST AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND
FIJI PHYSIOTHERAPY TRAINING PLACEMENT
HOBART & MELBOURNE
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Background to Interplast's Fiji programs

Fiji has the largest population in the Pacific other than Papua New Guinea (estimated at 881,000 in 2013) spread across more than 300 islands. The demand for plastic and reconstructive services in Fiji is high. There are significant numbers of untreated cleft lip and cleft palate cases and a high incidence of burn scars and contractures. Hand injuries are also common.

Interplast has been delivering surgical and training in Fiji since 1983, and has implemented over 120 program activities. Programs have focused on plastic and reconstructive surgery, and training for surgeons, anaesthetists, nurses, and more recently, on local allied health professionals. Interplast has been working in partnership with the Physiotherapy department at the Colonial War Memorial (CWM) Hospital in Suva, along with the Faculty of Physiotherapy at the Fiji National University for a number of years, with these programs directed at training Fijian physiotherapy staff and students in rehabilitation of burns injuries and hand trauma.

Fijian physiotherapist Alena has been working with Interplast teams for 3 years, in particular with Interplast volunteer physiotherapist Mrs Jennifer Ball, who visits Fiji on a regular basis. Alena has been identified as one of the senior physiotherapists by the CWM Hospital, and is now the key referral point for local surgeons for the rehabilitation of hand and burns patients. It was identified by the head of the Physiotherapy Department at the CWM Hospital, and Jenny, which Alena would benefit greatly from a training attachment in Australia, supported by Interplast's physiotherapy and hand therapy volunteers, with a particular focus on hand management and burns.



(Above): Jenny & Alena working together with a young physio patient in Suva.

Description and outcomes of this program



Interplast was extremely grateful to Rotary District 9685 for generously funding this program, to provide an invaluable training opportunity for Alena.

Alena's training program was in two parts – Hobart, and Melbourne, in September 2015.

In Hobart, she spent 7 days attached to the Plastic Surgery department at the Royal Hobart Hospital, and Jenny Ball's physiotherapy practice. She attended the clinics at the physiotherapy practice on a daily basis, and the hand clinics at the Royal Hobart Hospital. She focused primarily on hand cases – management of hand trauma and physiotherapy following hand surgery, and was taught, through practical demonstration and specific tutorials about hand anatomy, designing patterns, splint making, and the use effective use of various materials and

resources which would be available to her back in Fiji.

Alena was provided with an extensive collection of physiotherapy tools and protocols which she could take back to Fiji to adapt for use in the local context. During her time in Hobart, she was



also able to attend a number of workshops and discussions with the surgical teams, a number of whom have volunteered as surgeons on Interplast programs in Fiji and elsewhere. During these sessions she was exposed to the 'whole of team' approach to surgery and physiotherapy in Australia, and was also able to attend the monthly journal discussion with the surgeons.

(Left): Alena with the physio team in Hobart, including Interplast volunteer physiotherapist Jenny (far left).

In Melbourne, Alena undertook a 3-day intensive placement at the Alfred Hospital, based in the hand therapy and physiotherapy departments, with a specific focus on burns management, hosted by a number of Interplast volunteers who work at the Alfred. She was able to attend ward rounds with the burns physiotherapists and occupational therapists, observe treatment of burns patients in the ICU and plastics ward and attend the hand clinic with the occupational therapists. She was also able to attend the weekly Plastics team meeting, which included consultant surgeons, physiotherapists, OTs, nurses and social workers.



(Right): Alena with one of the burns therapists from The Alfred Hospital

Of the experience, Alena says “*It was overwhelming to learn from the highly qualified specialists such as the hand physiotherapists, plastic surgeons, and occupational therapists. Over the two week period of attachment, so much was learnt in terms of identifying changes and improving patient care according to the very limited resources available back home in Fiji*”.



Alena also had the opportunity to meet some of the 'locals' (left) and see the sights of Melbourne (right & below).



The future

Since returning to Suva, Alena has finished her final training exams and continues to work in the CWM Hospital physiotherapy department, assigned specifically to manage the physiotherapy requirements of the hands and burns cases. The head of her department has noted a substantial improvement in her work ethic and skills following her training in Australia, and she informed us that Alena is now taking a leadership role in training the junior physiotherapists who all undertake a rotation through the hand clinic where she teaches them about splints and compression garments (*pictured right and below*).



Interplast will continue to support Alena and her colleagues in building their skills through regular mentoring visits to Fiji, and further training opportunities in Australia where funding permits.

We again thank Rotary District 9685 for their invaluable support of this training program.