



SUPPORTER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT REPORT

Nuku'alofa, Tonga, Surgical & Mentoring Visit 2023

Rotarians & Clubs of the District 9820 Peninsula Cluster



Interplast[®]

Repairing bodies & rebuilding lives
in the Asia Pacific region

Recognising Your Impact

As valued supporters of Interplast Australia & New Zealand, your generosity and support directly benefited developing communities in the Pacific, by partnering with Interplast to provide the necessary funds to deliver our most recent program in Nuku'alofa, Tonga.

Thank you for your dedication to changing futures.

Your support has allowed our volunteer medical team to continue to undertake life-changing work alongside our local medical partners. This report provides a brief overview of the positive impact made possible through your involvement.

Following the success of this program, Interplast will continue to increase our reach; providing patients with life-changing medical procedures that they would otherwise not be able to access, while building the capacity of medical staff through a combination of formal training and professional mentoring.

We hope that you are able to continue supporting us on this journey.

As you will see from this report, the program you supported was a highly successful one and will have both immediate and long-lasting positive outcomes for the people of Tonga.

We cannot thank you enough for your assistance.

If you would like any further information about the program, or how your funding was used to repair bodies and rebuild lives please contact Interplast at your convenience.

Yours sincerely,



Cameron Glover

Chief Executive Officer
Interplast Australia & New Zealand

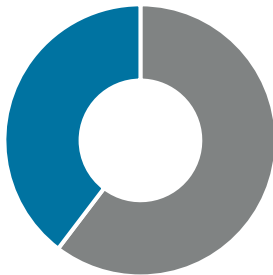


Stats&facts

Tonga plastic and reconstructive surgical and mentoring program

25th May – 3rd June 2023

Vaiola Hospital, Tonga



64%

of patients identified as being female



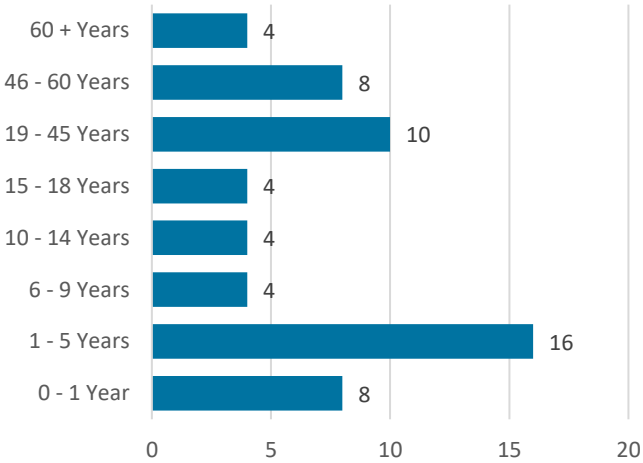
59

Patient consultations



39

Surgeries performed



32

Participants trained

32

Patients treated under 16 years of age



A Significant Need

TONGA COUNTRY INFORMATION:

One of the 17 countries across the Asia Pacific region where Interplast currently works, Tonga is a Polynesian kingdom and archipelago in the South Pacific consisting of more than 170 islands, 36 of which are inhabited. The main island, Tongatapu, is home to two-thirds of Tonga’s population. Tonga’s closest neighbours are Fiji to the northwest, Samoa to the Northeast and Vanuatu to the West.

With a total population of just over 100,000 people, life expectancy for Tongans at birth is 74 years for females and 68 years for males. The infant mortality rate is 10 per 1,000 live births. The Pacific, excluding Australia and New Zealand, has the second highest rate of children aged 5-14 dying globally, with an average of 8 deaths per 1,000 children aged 5.

The leading cause of death in Tonga is non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which account for 74% of all adult deaths in Tonga. The emergence of NCDs poses a significant challenge to the health system, with an estimated 99.9% of the adult population at moderate to high risk of developing an NCD.

Without a plastic and reconstructive surgeon in Tonga, Interplast teams are usually faced with a large caseload of burns injuries, tumours and congenital conditions, such as cleft lip and palate. Additionally, the growth of NCDs in Tonga has contributed to the rise of diabetic foot disease, which often results in lower limb amputations if not adequately managed.

PROGRAM HISTORY:

Interplast has been sending programs to Tonga since 1983, and since then the country program has generally included one annual surgical and training visit, with ad-hoc additional training opportunities for Tongan surgical trainees in Australia, New Zealand, or other Pacific Island countries such as Fiji. More recently, Interplast has been delivering specific nurse education programs, as well as mentoring for local physiotherapists.

Interplast currently works with two local general surgeons and three surgical registrars with an interest in reconstructive surgery. The objective with these surgeons is to develop their reconstructive surgical skills so that they can attend to the less complex plastics cases between Interplast visits. The local general surgeons and registrars are actively involved in Interplast visits and benefit from hands-on training. This also applies to the local anaesthetic, nursing and allied health staff.

Fast Facts Tonga	
Capital:	Nuku’alofa
Largest City:	Nuku’alofa
Official Language:	English Tongan
Ethnic Groups:	97% Tongan 0.8% Part-Tongan 2.2% Other
Formation:	Independence from the United Kingdom 4 June 1970
Area:	747 km ²
Population:	100,179 (Tonga Population & Housing Census 2021)

Changing Futures Together

ABOUT THIS PROGRAM:

From the 25th of May to the 3rd of June 2023, an Interplast volunteer team, including two plastic and reconstructive surgeons, two anaesthetists, and two nurses delivered a busy plastic & reconstructive surgical program at the Vaiola Hospital in Nuku'alofa, Tonga. During this program, the team provided consultations for 59 patients and undertook 39 life-changing surgical procedures, while concurrently providing invaluable clinical training to 32 local surgeons, nurses and anaesthetists.



The program was coordinated in collaboration with local Head of Surgery, Dr Bill Tangi, and General Surgeon, Dr Alamea Aholelei. The program's main objective was the provision of life-changing surgery and the training and mentoring of local staff to ensure sustainable change. In celebration of Interplast's 40 years in Tonga, and as Interplast's first trip back to Tonga since COVID-19 grounded overseas programs, the volunteer team set out to re-engage with partners at the Vaiola Hospital, the Ministry of Health and the Australian High Commission to Tonga to celebrate and reflect on 40 years of life-changing surgeries.

"It [wasn't] easy for the patients... they keep asking when is the team coming. And we keep on just explaining, they will come, they definitely will come. We are very grateful, and very happy that they are here now."

- Dr Bill Tangi, Head of Surgery, Vaiola Hospital

Members of this specific Interplast volunteer team have been involved with Interplast's programs to Tonga for over ten years, ensuring that each visit is an opportunity to further build upon existing personal and professional relationships with local partners.

The medical equipment and supplies travelled with the team from Australia, and the program was coordinated by the Interplast office in Melbourne. The first day of the program was a busy patient consultation clinic organised by Dr Tangi and Dr Aholelei – which included new patients, as well as many who had been treated in previous years and had returned for follow-up. The week following clinic in Nuku'alofa were long, busy operating days. During these days, 39 life-changing reconstructive surgical cases were undertaken alongside the local surgical teams.

MEET THE INTERPLAST MEDICAL TEAM:

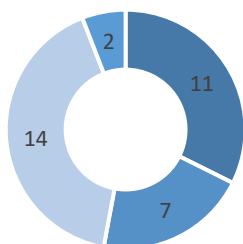
- Dr David Morgan | Surgeon (VIC)
- Dr Paul Goggin | Anaesthetist (VIC)
- Dr Graham Sellars | Surgeon (NSW)
- Ms Lauren Harrower | Nurse (VIC)
- Dr Sarah Goetz | Anaesthetist (QLD)
- Ms Samantha Jervios | Nurse (VIC)

Understanding Our Work

During the Tonga surgical program, the Interplast volunteer team worked alongside local medical partners to undertake 39 surgical procedures. These included, but were not limited to:

Procedure	Basic Explanation
Burns reconstruction	A tightening and scarring of the skin after a second or third degree burn. When skin is burned the surrounding skin begins to pull together resulting in a contracture which restricts movement. Surgery typically involves releasing the contracture by a local skin flap (z-plasty) or skin grafting (full or single thickness). A second degree burn involves the epidermis and part of the dermis. A third-degree burn involves the epidermis and the full thickness of the dermis.
Upper limb surgery	This encapsulates a range of surgeries undertaken to restore the function and appearance of the hand. This involves treating patients with hand injuries, degenerative disorders, and birth defects of the hand.
Cleft lip repair	If the cleft lip is wide, special procedures like lip adhesion or a moulding plate device might help bring the parts of the lip closer together before the lip is fully repaired. Cleft lip repair usually leaves a small scar on the lip under the nose.
Cleft palate repair	Plastic surgeons connect the muscles of the soft palate and rearrange the tissues to close the cleft. This surgery requires general anaesthesia and a short hospital stay for recovery.

PROCEDURES PERFORMED:



- Cleft lip & palate
- Burns
- Tumours and cysts
- Congenital hand and foot anomalies

DIFFERING NUMBERS:

Although Interplast volunteers would like to assist every individual who presents for a consultation, there are a number of reasons why this is not possible.

Primarily, surgical intervention will only be attempted if:

- Follow-up care is appropriate and can support the needs of the individual
- The surgery will restore a level of function – cosmetic outcomes are not the immediate priority
- The surgery will positively impact the patient. Not all surgical intervention is a good idea.

Stories of Success

INTRODUCING SPENCER

When Spencer was just 2 years old, his family experienced a terrible house fire in the middle of the night. Spencer was rescued from his home by bystanders but, tragically, his grandmother and baby sister passed away. Spencer's left arm and both feet were badly burnt in the fire, and over the years, the burns have formed thick, contracted scars on Spencer's body.

Children with burns scar contractures require complex care to prevent their scars from tightening as they grow. Without medical attention, their scars contractures can be debilitating, and will increasingly restrict the movement of the affected body part by tightening and pulling the surrounding skin together. Across the Asia Pacific region, children with burns scar contractures cannot play properly, and struggle to participate in their communities, as simple movements such as walking, running or carrying things can be painful and for some, impossible.



Fortunately, Interplast surgeons Dr Graham Sellars and Dr David Morgan, alongside local surgeon Dr Alamea Aholelei, were able to release the contractures to Spencer's left arm and one of his feet using a full-thickness skin graft from Spencer's groin.

"Interplast being able to help him have more function to his hand and leg is a light at the end of the tunnel for this child"

- Dr Alamea Aholelei, General Surgeon, Vaiola Hospital.

With no specialist plastic surgeons in Tonga, Spencer and his family waited for 2 years to receive life-changing plastic and reconstructive surgery from Interplast. The successful surgery will have a major



impact on Spencer's immediate future and that of his family. It's an unfortunate reality in many countries in the Asia Pacific region that a lack of resources combined with limited training means people with treatable conditions are often not treated fast enough or well enough – if they are treated at all. This is why the Interplast volunteer team to Tonga will continue to support Dr Aholelei to develop her clinical skills so that she can undertake some of the local burns caseload herself.

Stories of Success

INTRODUCING PASILIO

The Interplast volunteer team met 7-year-old Pasilio on the first day of the program. Pasilio's parents were eager to have their youngest of five children assessed by the Interplast team. At the clinic, Pasilio's condition was alarming, and he was given priority for surgery.

The Interplast team learnt that in 2019, when Pasilio was just 4 years old, his t-shirt caught fire and he suffered terrible burns to his chest, neck and both armpits.

Without any specialist burns or plastic surgical care in Tonga, Pasilio has waited over three years to receive any treatment for his injuries. In this time, Pasilio's burns have formed thick scar contractures which completely immobilised his neck and severely reduced the function of his arms. Interplast volunteer anaesthetist Dr Sarah Goetz described Pasilio's scar contractures as completely 'tethering' his chin to his chest and his arms to his sides. It's an unfortunate reality in many countries in the Pacific that a lack of

resources combined with limited training means people with treatable conditions are often not treated fast enough or well enough – if they are treated at all.

Due to the severity of Pasilio's contractures, the anaesthetic team were concerned that they would not be able to position his head properly to intubate him, as the scar tissue permanently held his chin down.

"He presents us major challenges... it's one thing to be able to do the operation, but we have to be able to get him off to sleep safely and then wake him up safely... It will be a challenge, but he needs this surgery."

- *Dr Paul Goggin, Interplast Volunteer Anaesthetist*

Fortunately, Interplast plastic surgeon Dr David Morgan and local surgical registrar Dr Salesi Akaua were able to release some of Pasilio's scars on his chest and under his right armpit using a skin graft from his thigh. Next year, Pasilio will need to be assessed by the Interplast team again to release his left arm and further contractions under his chin.

For now, Pasilio can at least get his chin to a neutral position and lift one arm above his head. Hopefully, he will be able to go back to school and get back to playing his much-loved soccer. In the future, Pasilio's parents believe their son wants to become a doctor. As a result of his experience with the Interplast program, he might like to help treat people himself.



A Lasting Legacy

A key feature of all Interplast programs is our commitment to building sustainable medical outcomes for the communities we serve. The Nuku'alofa surgical program will positively impact the people of Tonga through:

- Investing in the skill development and capacity building of local medical practitioners. Clinical teaching and mentoring took place continuously in theatre with two general surgeons, three local surgical registrars, one anaesthetist and five anaesthetic nurses. This also extended to the local theatre nursing staff.
- The surgical registrars attended most of the operations and performed some portions of the operations. Each operation and the planning and execution was discussed with the registrars.
- Working with the local surgery team in Tonga to focus on complex cases and provide advice to the local team means that the local team can continue delivering some of the surgery themselves, independently of Interplast's assistance.

From Our Local Partners...

"This has been a milestone for us local nurses... To learn and continue to develop new skills and techniques from every visit. Thank you"

Sela,
Senior Nurse,
Vaiola Hospital, Nuku'alofa, Tonga

"Thank you very much for what you have done for the patients... we can see the difference before and after... we were all happy when we see the patients, that they were happy too."

Talosia,
Occupational Therapy Manager,
Vaiola Hospital, Nuku'alofa, Tonga

THANK YOU TO THE ROTARY CLUBS OF MT ELIZA, DROMANA, HASTINGS-WESTERNPORT, MORNINGTON, MT MARTHA, ROSEBUD-RYE, SOMERVILLE-TYABB & SORRENTO FOR SUPPORTING THIS PROGRAM.

YOUR SUPPORT OF INTERPLAST CHANGES FUTURES TODAY.



With sincere thanks...

“One of the great benefits of returning to the same country more than once is they get to learn who you are and how you work, and you get to learn who they are and how they work... So it was lovely when we turned up at the clinic to have everyone smile so genuinely at us, because we were back and here to help them again.”

*David Morgan
Interplast Team Leader and Plastic Surgeon*



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