



## Vakabauta Australia - an initiative of AHA - Surgical Training in Fiji, January 2011



Vakabauta is an initiative of Aussie Health Abroad - an organization which aims to provide medical education to doctors in developing countries. In January 2011, Vakabauta hosted its second surgical training conference - sponsoring surgeons from the Polynesian islands to learn the principles of upper limb surgery over the course of a one week program. Held on the island of Tavarua, the conference was a great success and saw 6 faculty members running sessions on a variety of topics relating to hand and wrist surgery. The training program 'Helping Hands: Achieving Surgical Excellence' also provided multimedia presentations that were interspersed with practical teaching and discussions overseen by the panel.

### Background to the conference

The south pacific islands are home to over one million people, and in Fiji alone 70% of people who present for medical aid are below the international poverty line. This statistic is probably mirrored in

other island communities. Many of these people depend on their hands for survival, and survival can

depend on heavy manual labour where they use machetes to harvest sugar cane, clear the land and build shelter. In addition, Rugby is a favourite pastime for the island men, and so both in leisure and survival their hands are at risk.



Because of the complexity of the hand, specialised training in hand surgery has become the norm in most Western countries, and is the province of specialist surgical groups - plastic and orthopaedic (or a marriage of the two). This is usually confined to post graduate fellowships via the various specialist-training colleges in the Western World. The subgroup is not huge, and there are a relatively finite group of world-class contributors. These clinicians have extraordinarily busy schedules, and tend to confine their information sharing to large international meetings, or to apprenticeships with elite fellows who have the privilege of training under their supervision.



Vakabauta has tried to meet the need of surgeons in the South Pacific by bringing this expert training to the “coal face”. The Helping Hands program has harnessed some of the best teaching in the world and produced a portable lecture series. This lecture series - by giants in upper limb surgery - were screened with state of the art home theatre projectors with high quality audio facilities. The venue was the island of Tavarua off the western seaboard of Viti Levu: central to Nadi international airport, but far enough away from the commitments of the local surgeons to allow them to both focus on the teaching and to relax and network with the other members of the group. This made it an ideal learning environment and provided an opportunity for building a professional network that will pay dividends long after the end of the conference.



### The Conference

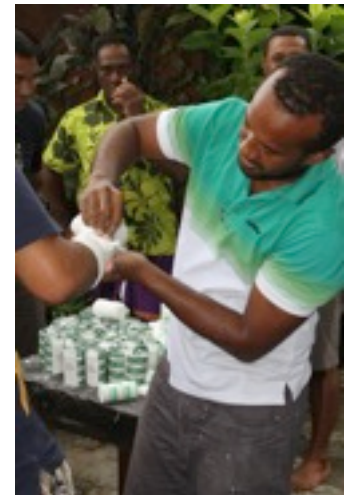
#### Participants - Faculty and Delegates



Surgeons from all over the South Pacific came to Nadi where they were met by the teaching faculty and an Aussie Health

Abroad staff member Kate Oxenbould. The faculty included:

- **John Crock** - (Plastic surgeon) Supervisor of Plastic Surgical training Southern Health network and founder of Vakabauta.
- **Greg Hoy** (Orthopaedic surgeon) Past president of the Australian shoulder/ elbow society, Victorian Hand society, and surgeon to the Australian Cricket team;
- **Shailendra Dass** Orthopaedic surgeon, Fiji born and Australia trained FRACS;
- **Tony Sobol** Orthopaedic surgical/A, AO trained surgical educator
- **Eddie McCaig** Orthopaedic surgeon, Professor of surgery Suva



Because surgery is applied anatomy, the group was also enhanced by the presence of :

- **Craig Adams**, former professor of Anatomy from Notre Dame University in Sydney, Australia, current head of Emergency Medicine, Fiji School of Medicine
- **Eddie McCaig**, past dean of the Fijian Medical school, who co-ordinated the local surgical group- Eddie still oversees all surgical training in the South Pacific.



### Conference Program

Cyclonic winds didn't deter the group, who arrived on Tavarua at 11.30am on Saturday 8th of January. Despite the torrential downpour, everyone quickly settled in, and the conference began with an opening ceremony immediately after lunch.

AHA General Manager Phil Roe welcomed everyone to the conference, and gave each faculty member an opportunity to introduce themselves. Professor Eddie McCaig was invited to speak on the impact the training would have on the South Pacific region, memorably declaring 'Do we need this teaching? Hell Yeah!'. Prof Ian Rouse of the Fijian School of Medicine also gave a welcoming address. Aussie Health Abroad donated to each of the attending surgeons a pair of forceps and a pair needle holders for use in their practices at home - a valuable commodity for any surgeon and one which they can use for their entire career. These were presented by Mr Crock, with the help of Professors McCaig and Rouse.



Each day consisted of between 7 to 9 hours of lectures and workshops. Sessions began at 9am and ran until 5pm with a break for lunch. Evening sessions were also held on some days. Workshops were tailored to areas pertinent to the attending surgeons practice and covered topics such as plastering techniques, tendon repairs, and z-plasty surgery.



For the tendon and Z-Plasty workshops, pigs' trotters were sourced from the mainland in order to give the participants the experience of stitching and reconstructing real tendons. The tendon repair workshops were preceded by teaching on tendon repair, and demonstrations given by the faculty. For the plastering sessions, the doctors practiced plastering each others arms, making sure that they removed the plaster before it

became too solid! During the workshops, the faculty closely supervised each doctor and gave them feedback on their progress.

These workshops were further enhanced by extensive anatomy sessions, which at one point involved 'body painting'- where the participants used paint to identify various key anatomical structures and landmarks on each other. Stations focussing on the hand, wrist, elbow and shoulder were set up and the doctors rotated through each station, supervised by faculty at each point. Monash University in Melbourne donated the use of a number of plastinated limbs (actual cadaver specimens that have undergone a preserving process) which aided significantly in the teaching. These limbs are very difficult to get hold of and in high demand in Melbourne, so we were extremely fortunate to have them for the conference. Certainly, getting the specimens through the customs x-ray machines was a memorable experience!

Another valuable component of the teaching program was case presentations and discussions from the registrars. This enabled the faculty to gauge the level of expertise, case load and circumstances of each of the trainees, and tailor discussion and teaching accordingly.

The informal and personalised nature of the conference meant that each attending doctor had a large amount of input from the faculty as well as ample opportunity to get to know the other attending surgeons. As one of the goals of the conference was to provide an environment in which professional networking could take place, it was great to see relationships being established through the week.

Outside of the formal teaching times, attending surgeons were given ample opportunities to ask surgical questions and discuss lectures informally. Meals were eaten in a communal setting, and attendees were encouraged to eat together with the faculty. An invaluable byproduct of the informal setting was chance surgeons were given to forge professional links not only amongst themselves but also with the international panel members. The establishment of this international network invariably leads to case conferencing and second opinions in ensuing years. Professional networks are a vital part of the practice of medicine and the format of the conference on Tavarua Island fostered the development of these important relationships in a way that would not be possible in the atmosphere of the large hotels on the mainland.



Below is a copy of the program for the week

Conference Schedule

**8th-15th January 2011-**

Saturday	Full faculty: Introduction/ Opening ceremony and philosophies 1pm till 5pm
Sunday	Craig Adams: Basic Anatomy of the Upper Limb and Shoulder. Clinical Anatomy 9am - 5pm, 7pm - 10pm
Monday	Craig Adams and local faculty: Forearm and Hand Anatomy, Hand Examination, Simple Hand Fracture Management 9am - 5pm, 8pm -10pm
Tuesday	USA and local Faculty: Brachial Plexus Examination, Participant Case Presentations, Tendon Repair, Fractures 9am - 5pm
Wednesday	USA and local faculty: Volar Plate Repair, Steroid Injections, Anatomy Review (body painting workshop) 9am - 5pm
Thursday	Local faculty: Fingertip Surgery/ Island Flaps/Ganglion Treatment, Tendon Repair 9am - 4pm
Friday	Australian and local faculty: Tendon Repair Workshop (all day), Final review session, Presentation of Certificates 9am - 3 pm.

**Helping Hands: An educational teaching program**

'Helping Hands: Achieving Surgical Excellence' is a training program covering the fundamentals of upper limb surgery, produced and overseen by Mr John Crock. The development of this program involved sending a team to several continents to film world leaders in hand and wrist surgery giving specifically targeted presentations in their home countries. These lectures were then crafted into a high quality, engaging audio visual training material. The lectures were captured by professional video-photographer Chase Burns and then expertly crafted into fascinating movies that were distillation of a lifetime of experience for each of the speakers. These lectures provided the framework of this symposium.

This Helping Hands program contributed to the educational conference on Tavarua Island in Jan 2011. Over the course of the week, various multimedia lectures were reinforced through practical hands-on sessions overseen by the faculty. The faculty then had a role in answering questions and expressing perspectives on the audio visual material.

Below is an overview of some of the speakers who feature on the series.

## Featured Speakers: Australia

**Jeff Ecker** is the chief of the Western Orthopedic group in Perth, Western Australia, and is a dynamic surgeon and educator who travels the world sharing his ideas and experiences. He has a specific interest in surgery of the hand and upper limb.

**Anthony Pohl** is an Orthopedic surgeon from South Africa who now lives in South Australia. He is a world leader in pelvic surgery and is legendary for his teaching on bone healing and the fracture disease. He runs unique and world famous training seminars in Australia.

**John Crock** is a plastic surgeon from Melbourne Australia, who has also founded the international outreach program Vakabauta. He has travelled to many continents to bring you this teaching experience.

**Wayne Morrison\*** is one of the most respected plastic surgeons in the world. A pioneer of reconstructive microsurgery, professor of surgery and internationally acclaimed educator and clinician, he works at St Vincent's hospital Melbourne and is also the director of the Bernard Obrien institute of plastic surgery - a world famous research center for plastic and reconstructive surgery

## United Kingdom and Europe United Kingdom.

**John Stanley** is an orthopedic surgeon from Wrightington in the north of England, and is famous for a number of advances in upper limb surgery. He helped define the modern era's understanding of wrist biomechanics, and has also lead the way in rheumatoid surgery of the hand.

**Doug Campbell** is an orthopedic surgeon from Leeds in northern England, and he is considered one of the best educators in upper limb surgery to come out of the United Kingdom.

**Gus McGrouther** is the professor of Plastic Surgery at Manchester and is a world expert not only in anatomy of the hand but also in the treatment of Dupuytren's disease, which is prevalent in his home environs.

### Europe.

**Marc Garcia-Elias** is professor of hand surgery from Barcelona, Spain. He is arguably the world expert on wrist biomechanics and

anatomy as well as being one of Europe's leading hand surgeons and implant designers.

## USA including Hawaii

**Jesse Jupiter** is professor of hand surgery from Harvard University. He has an outstanding academic reputation with hundreds of papers, keynote presentations and teaching ventures to boast of. He has an extraordinary depth of understanding pertaining to the hand.

**Scott Wolf** is the charismatic and energetic hand surgery professor from New York. He has a vibrant teaching style and a exudes enthusiasm for the discipline of hand surgery.

**Amy Ladd** is the professor of hand surgery from Stanford University. She has trained under the famous Robert Chase, and has carried the torch admirably. Her approach to wrist surgery is clear and enlightening.

**Rob Medoff** is the developer of the trimmed wrist fixation devices. He has extraordinary insight into the fracture disease of the wrist.

## Gratitudes

Vakabauta Australia would sincerely like to thank those who made the Tavarua Conference possible. The faculty who attended the conference graciously donated their time and effort to this very rewarding cause. We believe that the input they had will continue to reap benefits into the future as patients across the South Pacific are treated according to the training afforded their doctors.

Vakabauta Australia underwrote the cost of the conference, sponsoring the Pacific Island surgeons to attend the conference and covering the cost of transport, food, accommodation and conference fees. This would not have been possible without the kind support and donations received from our supporters. Many thanks to those who gave generous financial support to Vakabauta and made this happen.

It is our belief that the effects of the 2011 Surgical Training conference will continue to flow on into the future. Subscribing to the maxim 'give a man a fish and he will eat for a day - teach him to fish and he will never go hungry', this

years training program imbued the attending doctors with skills that will continue to give in to the lives of the South Pacific people.

