

# VAKABAUTA & SMA

Presents Upper limb conference in Male,



Maldiv Islands

Male, Maldives  
2nd to 5th November 2009

# Foreword by Kevin Naughtin

legendary Surf Journalist reports on related upcoming event in Fiji



"Surfers are some of the luckiest people on planet earth, or planet ocean to us. We get to ride waves in remote and beautiful places, free from the cares that bind the lives of others. Sometimes, though, in the places we travel to there's a lot to care about right under our sunburnt noses. Places where poverty and suffering are the coin of daily living and hope is the only luxury people can afford.

One man who is not immune to what he sees in these places is Australian surfer and sawbones, Dr. John Crock. As a plastic and reconstructive surgeon, John takes a hands-on approach to the physical afflictions of others. Problem is, there's just not enough hands to go around when it comes to the difficult tasks of surgery. So John has come up with a plan that's something like the maxim: "give someone a fish and you help them for a day, teach them how to fish and you help them for life."

It goes like this: invite indigenous doctors from the South Pacific to participate in a medical workshop where the world's leading specialists teach via satellite conferences and hands-on workshops advanced surgical procedures. The ones who benefit the most are the underprivileged communities where these indigenous doctors practice. Imagine the frustration of wanting to help but lacking the capabilities. That's what John is out to change.

It gets better. Tavarua Island is hosting this annual gathering of the doc's in January of 2010. The island that brought surfing to Fiji is now bringing medicine to those remote places where only surfers go. We, as surfers, can have a direct positive impact on the people who live in the far off places we surf by supporting a non-profit organization set up to help. Check out the website [www.vakabauta.org.au](http://www.vakabauta.org.au) for the full skinny. Vakabauta is Fijian for hope."

# Conference Overview

## **Principles of Upper Limb Surgery, Maldives**

Tucked away west of Sri Lanka and south of India, this group of atolls is home to over 300,000 souls, one third of whom live on the tiny island capital of Male. With 2kms to roam in any direction, the residents of this city look up for space to live, and the island is essentially wall-to-wall high-rise. This of course offers many opportunities for the building industry and the infrastructure is very good. Unfortunately many of the builders use unskilled laborers, and not surprisingly serious hand injuries are not uncommon here. The consequences of these injuries are devastating for not only the individuals but also the community at large.



### **The problem:**

Hand surgery is the province of specialist trained plastic and orthopedic surgeons, and so the very competent, well equipped and dedicated surgeons in the Maldives have been left wanting in this area of their training, if not experience.

### **The Solution:**

It was into this mix that Vakabauta (in conjunction with the Surfers Medical Association Australia) sowed its first upper limb training conference. The local community was so excited about this venture that the event was given air time on the national television twice, the president monitored proceedings, and the health minister met with us to plan ongoing interactions. 12 surgeons were exposed to teaching from world leaders in the area of upper limb surgery (the teachers were Rob Medoff from Hawaii, Jesse Jupiter from Harvard University, Amy Ladd from Stanford University, Scott Wolfe from New York University, John Stanley from Wrightington, Doug Campbell from Leeds, Gus McGrouther from Manchester University, Marc Garcia-Elias from Barcelona, Jeff Ecker from Perth, Anthony Pohl from Adelaide and HV Crock and John Crock from Melbourne.) Case discussion groups and interactive talks were also undertaken.



**The training the surgeons received is enough to change their practice for life,** but just as important were the links forged by this interaction. We plan to build on this foundation and establish “virtual clinic” infrastructure that will enable the local surgeons to easily access advice, mentoring and feedback



by internet, and thus be able to maintain their clinical skills and keep abreast of the latest developments in their field as well as handle many cases that may have hitherto been clinically challenging. We also plan to hold follow up meetings that will address specific areas of need in the community.

As an ancillary to this program, the SMA instigated meetings with the Thalassemia clinic in Male. This community has a disproportionate number of patients suffering from this crippling disease, and we were able to establish the needs of the medical teams involved in managing this cohort, and we plan to facilitate connections with medical experts in Australia to help our colleagues in their endeavors to treat the Moldavians.

# Acknowledgements



Dara Ahmed, cousin of the current President, who facilitated the meeting.



Harry Gatt, Head of SMA Australia and facilitator of this course.



Dr Mohammed Habeeb, Head of Orthopedics in Male, opens the conference -watched by the CEO, Zubair Muhammad.



Zubair Muhammad, CEO of the hospital, spent much time with us planning ongoing work



Boat transport was arranged daily by the Ministry of Health



Abdul Bari Abdulla, minister of health, meeting with us to plan for the future.



Iboo Hussein Areef, national surfing champion of the Maldives, and his wife. Iboo also facilitated this meeting.



Dr. Thomas Joy, senior Orthopedic surgeon, who made all the infrastructure arrangements for the meeting.



News reporter from the Moldavian TV station