

## The “Regional” Medical School in Fiji: 125 YEARS YOUNG – WHAT AN AMAZING JOURNEY.

Professor Ian Rouse

Dean, College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, Fiji National University.

---

***“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire”. William Butler Yeats***

It’s a privilege to contribute to this special edition of the Pacific Health Dialog which celebrates the long history of the medical school in Fiji – a school which has played a key role in the education of so many talented Pacific Island sons and daughters.

I joined the Fiji School of Medicine as Dean in April 2009 and have overseen its transition to be part of the Fiji National University and its merger into a College with the Fiji School of Nursing. To some staff this has been a really significant personal challenge. To me it’s just another phase in the history of the medical school and a stimulus to make an even bigger contribution to quality health and medical education in all Pacific Island countries and territories.

We all live in a period of great change in the world. Change is not new but with globalization and telecommunications ... the pace of change is fast – very fast. Someone’s very good idea can, in half a decade, have hundreds of millions of online participants.

Medical education has seen and will continue to see many changes – in pedagogy, scope and location, but still grounded in relevance and regional importance. We now have four medical schools in the Region and many Pacific Island students being educated outside the region. Demand for graduates in medicine and other health disciplines continue to rise.

In this context, the Fiji School of Medicine has made an immeasurable contribution to the training of health professionals in the region - although not without many challenges. The last decade in particular has been very challenging for a number of reasons – but I am convinced that the organization is rising to the challenges to be an even stronger one with a greater regional focus. That is certainly my vision as Dean.

In this issue there is a review of the book by a former Dean of the School, Dr David Brewster. It is a seminal work on the Medical School in Fiji. In my view, it’s a must read for all who are interested in medical training in the Pacific. That doesn’t mean we will all agree with every point made by the author – but I know that the author encourages healthy dialogue.

Over the past 30 years I have worked in 4 universities and 2 government health departments. In every place I have worked I have faced challenges. I have yet to work in the perfect organization. The Fiji School of Medicine is no exception. But it is one of the few places I have worked where I go home each day feeling that the work of the institution is of great importance to the health of the people in the Region and where my contribution is valued.

For someone interested in health, education and cultural diversity, the Fiji School of Medicine, despite all of its challenges, has to be one of the most rewarding places to work.

For an educator with a long enthusiasm for lists I feel compelled to conclude with the following ten thoughts about the Fiji School of Medicine.

- The Fiji School of Medicine has had, and continues to have, internationally recognized programs. That's something to celebrate after 125 years. Our flagship program is recognized internationally by the World Federation of Medical Education. Our key programs in dentistry, laboratory science, pharmacy, medical imaging are also recognized for the quality of our graduates.
- 125 years is OLD. In fact the medical school in Fiji is one of the oldest medical programs in the Region. The program in Melbourne is about 25 years older, the program in Otago is 10 years older, but there are very few other medical programs in Japan, China, Korea, Australia, The Philippines and New Zealand as old as the program in Fiji.
- The Fiji School of Medicine is respected in the Region for the key contribution that we have made and continue to make in training doctors and health professionals that are career ready and compassionate.
- There are some wonderful and committed young people in the Pacific Islands, and many have come to the Fiji School of Medicine over the past 125 years. With training, vision and personal commitment they have made, and in many cases continue to make a significant contribution to the Region.
- The training program in Fiji, with its strong and possibly unique community practice and service orientation, graduates outstanding health professionals. The long list of outstanding Pacific Islanders who are our alumni are testament to this fact.
- This institution has an exciting and colorful history filled with great characters as both students and staff. We shouldn't stay in the past – but we can still remember some wonderful history. This was clearly evident as part of the many celebratory events held last year.
- There are many of the alumni of graduates of the Fiji School of Medicine who have made a substantial and unique civic contribution in their respective countries, as Prime Ministers, Deputy Prime Ministers, Permanent secretaries for health, and heads of various organizations. I am overwhelmed with the reach and impact of the alumni of this organization and believe that we should celebrate their contribution to the Region.
- The Fiji School of Medicine has made many friends from around the world in the past 125 years. Many who have fond memories of the School of Medicine long after they retired, and many who have continued to contribute to the well-being of the organization through tough times.
- There has always been and there always will be significant challenges for the future graduates of the Fiji School of Medicine. We may have moved on from Measles or Cholera or Influenza to HIV or NCD's. But the challenges will always be there. I want to graduate professionals who are career ready to deal with what lies ahead.
- We are different people but we are part of the one Pacific family. The students who come to the Fiji School of Medicine are the jewels of the Pacific. As a "family" we have to work together to overcome the burdens that lie ahead. That will be our next big challenge. The School has a long history of seeing the people of the Pacific as our own children. That is a strong bond for the future that will not be broken.