



Helena Goldie Partnership Report 2013

Background

The Helena Goldie Partnership is a UnitingCare Health initiative, with partner UnitingWorld, which began in 2010 to assist the Helena Goldie Hospital in the Solomon Islands. The Partnership aligns with UnitingCare Health's values of compassion, respect, justice, working together and leading through learning.

The Solomon Islands consists of more than 900 islands about 1,900 kilometres northeast of Australia. The total population of Solomon Islands is estimated to be about 600,000, 85 per cent of whom live on remote islands, and live by subsistence means. Only 14 per cent of the population has paid employment.

Healthcare in the Solomon Islands

With such a small population and low tax base the Solomon Islands healthcare system is heavily reliant on overseas aid, notably from the Republic of Taiwan and Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID).

The Solomon Islands is classified as one of 57 countries with a critical shortage of health workers. There is a significant workforce deficit on every level of care. At present there are 70 doctors across the whole nation (50 of whom are based in Honiara). Consequently the majority of healthcare is provided by nurses and nurse aids.

Major health issues in the Solomons include tuberculosis, malaria and diabetes. Only five per cent of the population live to be over 65

The basis of Solomon Island health services are the 187 Nurse Aid Posts. Commonly located in remote areas, they are small clinics staffed by one Nurse Aid who provides first aid, basic primary healthcare, emergency birthing and observation of sick patients prior to referral to a higher-level facility.



Solomon Island Health Clinic

As well as the government run National Referral Hospital in Honiara there are seven provincial hospitals, mostly run by church-based organisations. Helena Goldie Hospital (HGH) is a 68-bedded hospital situated in Munda, in the Western Province of the Solomon Islands. It was established in 1903 by Methodist Missionaries, and is now owned by the United Church in the Solomon Islands (UCSI). Currently there are two English missionary doctors working in the hospital as well as over 60 employees including nurses, paramedics and supporting staff.

The Solomon Islands Government is seeking to improve the health care system by providing:

- More doctors
- Better access to medicines and vaccines
- Further remote Nurse Aid Posts
- More remote area clinics run by registered nurses
- Hospital patients cared for by registered nurses.

Helena Goldie College of Nursing (HGCN)

In line with the government’s intention to increase the number of registered nurses, the Helena Goldie College of Nursing was opened in 2010.

The Helena Goldie Nurse Aid Training School had been a well respected nursing school in the Solomon Islands since the 1960s and began its first full-fledged course for Diploma in April 2010. That first cohort of nurses graduated at the end of their three year programme in April 2013



How did UnitingCare Health get involved?

The relationship between UnitingCare Health and the Helena Goldie Hospital began around 2003, with donations of playground equipment from the Sunshine Coast Private Hospital. The donations expanded to include medical and surgical supplies and in 2008 UnitingCare Health launched a long term assistance programme. This had the goal of “Improving the general health and well being of the community” through supporting the education of nurses at Helena Goldie Hospital and College of Nursing. The first team of nurses and allied health staff visited in 2010 and the bi-annual visits have continued since then.

A staff based Nursing Student Sponsorship scheme was established in 2011 which has significantly increased the assistance we are able to offer the Solomon Island nurses.



What does UnitingCare Health contribute?

At Helena Goldie Hospital we offer:

- Help with medical and surgical resources
- Hands on nursing
- In-service training

At Helena Goldie College of Nursing we offer:

- Educational Support (teaching, resources, etc)
- Sponsorship of Nursing Students

Resources

New and used resources are gratefully received and used by the resourceful staff at the HG Hospital or as training tools at the College of Nursing.

Nursing

UnitingCare Health nurses work in the Helena Goldie hospital to support the hospital staff and at the same time gain an idea of the scope and context that the nursing students will be working in. They also develop a huge respect for the capabilities of the Helena Goldie Hospital nurses. Often the Solomon Island nurses are offering a range of care well beyond the scope of western nurses.



Educational Support

UnitingCare Health staff offer help by teaching particular topics as well as providing input and resources in regard to teaching methodology and curriculum development.

(Solomon Island students are required to learn in their third language, English, the other two being their local language and Pidjin).



Student Nurse Sponsorship Scheme

The average Nurse Aid wage in the Solomon Islands is approximately \$A1200 pa.

The cost of nursing education at the College is \$A3000 per annum. Accommodation costs for students from other islands are a further \$A800 per semester.

For most students, often with families to support, this is completely beyond their means.

Since 2011 UnitingCare Health staff have been contributing to a sponsorship scheme. Through payroll deductions they can contribute from as little as \$3 per fortnight. Currently there are 180 sponsors on the payroll and as of December 2013 over A\$56,000 had been raised, including money from a variety of other fundraising initiatives.

For the selected students the UnitingCare Health sponsorship programme pays for:

- Tuition fees
- Accommodation
- Two meals a day
- Travel and accommodation costs for other clinical placements

The first students to be sponsored, Angeline and Angelina both graduated in April 2013. Angelina did particularly well and graduated as dux. She is now working at the National Referral Hospital in Honiara and hopes to go on to do post-graduate nursing studies. Angeline is working at Gizo Hospital, the government hospital in the Western Province





In 2013 UnitingCare Health sponsored four more students

- Lorene was a third year student in 2013. When her father died suddenly her family were unable to continue their support. UnitingCare Health were approached to help her complete her studies and Lorene will graduate in 2014.

Three first year students were sponsored in 2013:

- Cynthia Sagu (30) was born and lives in Lodumaho village behind the Helena Goldie Hospital. She has been a Nurse Aid there for five years.
- Elijah Melyota (27) has been a nurse aid for two years. From the Temetu province of Santa Cruz, 985km away, he will probably only see his wife and child once a year while he is training.
- Thaddeus Siota (30) He has been a Nurse Aid for three years. He is married with two children. His wife and children are expecting to return to live with family in Santa Isobel in 2014.

By contributing to the sponsorship scheme UnitingCare Health staff have the opportunity to make a difference throughout the Solomon Islands as students return to their communities and work to improve the quality of healthcare around their nation.

2013 Summary

The first cohort of nurses graduated from Helena Goldie College of Nursing - including two nurses sponsored by UnitingCare Health (UCH).

UCH Team – Nurses Wendy Zernike, Rachel Oxford and Jody Way presented teaching modules in Research, Epidemiology, Nursing Practice and Preceptorship. They worked in the hospital in all wards but primarily in Outpatients. Murray Fysh on his final visit was invited to teach at Goldie College (UCSI secondary school). UnitingCare Health's Director of Mission, Reverend Helen Dick began work with the College to develop a 'Spiritual Development Curriculum'.

\$17,304 was raised from staff salary contributions.

Sponsorship and support was provided to four students at a cost of close to \$15,000, (over \$26,000 currently sits with Uniting World. Approximately \$25,000 will be needed to meet 2014 fees).

Dr David Coman, a paediatrician at the Wesley Hospital made a week long visit to the Solomons accompanied by Jo Hardcastle, a member of the 2012 team.

2014

UCH team - Helen Dick, Wendy Zernike, Maxine Thomas (The Sunshine Coast Private Hospital), Katie Pullinger (The Wesley Hospital), will visit in April and September. Richard Royle, Executive Director UnitingCare Health, will also visit in April to attend the Graduation.

Three HGCN students from 2013 will continue to be sponsored in 2014 plus an additional three from this year's intake.

Background Issues

Staffing at Helena Goldie Hospital – Drs Dina and Zhoti have returned to India.

This is the final year of service for Drs Graham and Jenny Longbottom, who will finish at Christmas. There is uncertainty over future funding of doctors by missionary societies.

Chris Levy – Director of Nursing at HG Hospital has resigned to take up a position at Gizo.

Opportunities

- Exploration of opportunities to provide assistance at other UCIS hospitals
- Exploration of opportunities for clinicians associated with UCH to provide specialised care to the Solomon Islands