CMNHS
College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences

INSIGHTS

INSIGHTS is the monthly research newsletter of the College of Medicine, Nursing & Health Sciences of FNU, providing updates in research activities conducted by its staff, students and those under the Fiji Institute of Pacific Health Research.

FIPHR

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NOVEMBER 2025
ISSUE 2

Insights

About the Cover Photo
Jone Davila | Na Turaga Ratu Mai Bureta signs the FPIC Consent form

Welcome Message

Dr. Donald Wilson
Associate Dean Research CMNHS
Director Fiji Institue of Pacific Health Research (FIPHR)

Dear Readers,

We've had a very productive month, and this issue of "INSIGHTS" is packed with key highlights!

- Our Research Centres are making significant strides. We are proud to report that the Watershed Interventions for Systems Health (WISH) Pacific project successfully obtained 100% Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) from all 17 villages where they will be working over the next four years.
- The Arbovirus and Other Emerging Virus Infections (AEVI) project has officially launched, thanks to the support of AFD and ANRS | Emerging Infectious Diseases (France).
- We are also thrilled to feature the ongoing, impactful work being done by our health research students in this edition.

Do remember to follow our Fiji Institute of Pacific Health Research page on Facebook https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61573882786738 for news, events and research updates or let us know what you think we should highlight in our next issue.

Until next month.

Vinaka Vakalevu.

LAUNCH SUCCESS: AEVI PROJECT BEGINS


AEVI Launch

We are thrilled to announce the official launch of the AEVI Project in Fiji. This significant milestone marks the beginning of a crucial three-year research collaboration focused on infectious diseases across selected communities in Fiji's Central Division.

The launch event was greatly honored by the presence of several distinguished guests, including:

- Mrs. Elodie Vitalis, Head of the Agence Française de Développement (AFD), who officiated the launch.
- Mr. Benjamin Delannoy from the French Embassy.
- Dr. Van Mai from ILM French Polynesia.
- Representatives from various key Fijian stakeholders, including the Provincial Councils, Town and City Councils, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MOHMS), CMNHS–FNU, and FIPHR.

The AEVI Project is proudly supported by AFD and ANRS | Emerging Infectious Diseases (France).

The objective of this initiative is both simple and significant: to deepen our understanding of infectious diseases and to actively strengthen community-based surveillance and response systems. Ultimately, this work is dedicated to better protecting the health and well-being of our communities.

Vinaka vakalevu to every individual and organization that dedicated time and effort to realize this milestone - from the tireless research and logistics teams to our invaluable partners and community representatives. This is an exciting start to what promises to be a transformative journey for health research here in Fiji and across the wider Pacific region.


Cutting the AEVI Launch cake

MINISTRY of HEALTH & MEDICAL SERVICES
Shaping Fiji's Health

FNU FIJI NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Cohort study of
Arbovirus and Other Emerging Virus Infections

What is the AEVI Project?

A 3 years cohort study

On mosquito-borne and respiratory viruses

How to Participate?

If you live in the central division

If your house has been selected

Adults and children 6 years and above

Aim

Learn how viruses like dengue, Zika, and influenza spread

What goals?

learn how viruses spread

to improve public health responses

Coming Soon to Your Community

The AEVI Research Team will come to the selected houses to answer your questions

Look out for announcements from your village leaders or health workers.

Contact Us: 3314800 or visit us at Hoodless House- Brown Street, or

Learn More: www.fnu.ac.fj

This study is done in collaboration with: ilm, EDCS, MINISTRY of HEALTH & MEDICAL SERVICES, INSTITUT Pasteur, AFD, anrs

Winners of the 3MT Competition - Dr Nitik (right) and Runner Up Kelera with Associate Dean Research Dr Donald Wilson

3MT MOTIVATES STUDENTS TO REFINE PRESENTATION SKILLS

The Centre for Graduate Studies (CGS) at the Fiji National University recently held its much-anticipated 2025 Three Minute Thesis (3MT) competition!

Developed by The University of Queensland, the 3MT is a challenging and interdisciplinary event designed to showcase the brightest of our next-generation students and early-career professionals. Participants are tasked with delivering a compelling oration on their thesis topic and its significance in just three minutes.

It's more than just speed! 3MT isn't about simplifying or "dumbing down" research. Instead, it's a crucial exercise that pushes students to distill complex ideas and significant research discoveries into a concise, engaging presentation for a non-specialist audience.

With participation open to anyone who is active in the Graduate Programme or Master by Coursework the 3MT;

- provides participants with networking opportunities amongst likeminded individuals.
- celebrates and promotes excellent talent in
- academia and the innovation sector
- Strengthens links between research and development across academia and business
- enables participants to communicate their ideas effectively to the wider community and audience

Kelera Naivalu, Fiji Reproductive Strategies for Healthier Communities (FRESH) Research Coordinator and Master by Health Research candidate, presented her 3MT on how healthcare providers and communities perceive sexually transmitted infections and the barriers to treatment access. Her work will support a trusted, culturally informed public health response and also guide the larger FRESH trial to reduce STI rates and protect maternal and newborn health in Fiji.

Kelera presenting at the 3MT Competition

"Imagine a silent epidemic. One that is affecting millions daily, yet many people don't even know they have it. My research will be on two common sexually transmitted infections that are quietly spreading in Fiji. They are chlamydia and gonorrhea.
In Fiji, one in three pregnant women test positive for chlamydia. Yet, people are still getting sick, and they are not getting the help they need.
Stopping these infections is not only about medication - it is about listening, learning, and working together as a community for a healthier Fiji."

Kelera Naivalu
3MT presentation excerpt

COMMUNITIES CONSENT FOR WISH PACIFIC PROJECT


WISH Project Catchment Coordinator - Ponipate presenting on FPIC

At the core of the WISH Pacific Project's ethical engagement is the **Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)** process.

To understand its importance, we must first look at the foundations of Planetary Health in the Pacific - a framework built on the deep connection between human well-being and environmental health.

In Fiji and across the Pacific, culture and environment are inseparable.

Fijian life is shaped by traditions, customary governance, and relational community structures. When projects use a purely Western scientific lens, they risk failing because they overlook the very systems that govern daily decision-making. The WISH Fiji Project's approach was powerful in its simplicity: localize Planetary Health, root solutions in Indigenous practices, and let change grow from within.

The WISH Project was designed to address the drivers of ill-health by combining ecosystem-based interventions with water safety and sanitation measures. Success required a whole-of-government, whole-of-community approach, bringing together partners from iTaukei Affairs, Health, Rural Development, and others. While technical interventions are vital, how we engage is paramount. The Ministry of iTaukei Affairs required written community consent via FPIC. Lacking detailed guidance, we co-designed a robust process that generated value far beyond a simple signature.

FPIC is essential because it:

- Recognizes and respects the rights of Indigenous communities.
- Empowers communities to discuss and set conditions for project design and implementation.
- Builds trust and respect by ensuring active, inclusive participation and proper information sharing.
- Reduces risks and lays the groundwork for future collaboration.

This ethical commitment was extended to all 17 communities, including those of Fijians of Indian descent, ensuring every key stakeholder fully understood and consented to the project's direction.

To ensure genuine, ethical engagement, we co-designed and rolled out a 3-Stage FPIC framework over five months across 17 communities. This process moved beyond simple consultation, embedding respect and participation at every level.

The three phases were:

1. **Phase 1:** Engaging Traditional Leaders - Gaining formal entry and consent from village councils and chiefs, respecting the correct hierarchical protocols.
2. **Phase 2:** Awareness Consultations - Joint presentations with government partners on project objectives, risks, and benefits, ensuring full information disclosure.
3. **Phase 3:** Collective Consent - Communities formally made their decision, which was often a "Yes, with conditions."

This conditional consent was key. Many of the households that consented, attached requirements for additional support, such as infrastructure improvements, stronger resource management, and - crucially - that all research findings be shared back with them first. By honoring these conditions, the project demonstrated respect and accountability, which led directly to community ownership.

The FPIC framework built a bridge between traditional governance and scientific assessments, proving that consent is not a transaction, but a long-term relationship.

The impact of this approach included:

- Strengthened Local Governance: Communities enhanced their water and sanitation committees.
- Empowered Leadership: They developed locally led Water Safety and Sanitation Plans based on their own community profiles and improvement strategies.
- Increased Legitimacy: By working through customary governance systems, we built lasting trust and legitimacy.

Community members during FPIC presentation

Senior Assistant Roko Tui Lomaiviti - Maikeli presenting

Obtaining FPIC enabled communities to lead decision-making, respecting their autonomy and traditional knowledge, making interventions stronger and more sustainable.

Working within community systems brings realities that must be embraced, not feared. We see these not as obstacles, but as considerations that guide a better way to engage:

Consideration	Description	Solution-Oriented Mindset
Hierarchy of Leadership	Engagement must follow the layered structure of traditional chiefs, church leaders, and government. Bypassing a leader can break community trust.	Acknowledge identity and respect by following the correct order of protocols.
Government Staff Turnover	High staff changes require constant re-explanation and orientation, weakening consistency.	Implement strong documentation and continuity plans that outlast individuals.
Community Commitment	Funerals, weddings, and religious events take precedence over external engagements, reflecting the heart of community life.	Build patience and flexibility into timelines; respect these priorities by adjusting schedules.
Cultural Nuances	Subtle expectations regarding tone, who to address first, and non-verbal cues.	Practice **cultural humility** - ask, observe, and adapt to form deep bonds of trust.

These realities remind us that the work is always people first. When people feel respected, engaged, and valued, lasting change becomes possible.

The WISH Project experience demonstrates that Indigenous consent frameworks are vital for Planetary Health. Customary governance strengthens legitimacy and ownership. When science and culture walk together, partnerships are respectful, communities are empowered, and both people and ecosystems thrive.

Akanisi Marama (left) with ladies at Delakado Village

Turaga ni Koro, Navuloa (pointing) with community members

RESEARCH CANDIDATE TESTIMONIAL

Name: Jiaoji Victor Tuimoala
PROGRAM: MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH (RESEARCH) PROVISIONAL CANDIDATE
COLLEGE: COLLEGE OF MEDICINE, NURSING & HEALTH SCIENCES, FIJI NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

My Master's by Research, titled **"Smart Maps, Smarter Surveillance: A GIS–Machine Learning Approach to Dengue in Suva, Fiji (2015–2025),"** integrates Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Machine Learning (ML) to develop a predictive framework for dengue surveillance in Suva's urban and climatic context. By linking epidemiological, environmental, and meteorological data, the study seeks to shift Fiji's dengue response from reactive control to proactive prediction, enabling more evidence-based public health interventions.

Drawing on experience as a Research Assistant and Team Leader with the PASS Fiji Project and as a volunteer member of the Fiji Red Cross Society, I have cultivated a strong interest in data-driven public health strategies that enhance community resilience. My technical foundation in design and systems thinking, developed through over a decade of service with the Corps of Royal Engineers (British Army), complements my academic background in public health.

This multidisciplinary perspective underpins my commitment to developing low-cost, scalable, and context-appropriate digital surveillance systems for small island settings. Ultimately, this research aims to strengthen national and regional health system resilience by demonstrating how spatial intelligence and data integration can inform timely dengue prevention, resource allocation, and climate-sensitive health planning across the Pacific.

Name: Nazmeen Khan
PrograM: PhD CANDIDATE
COLLEGE: COLLEGE OF MEDICINE, NURSING & HEALTH SCIENCES, FIJI NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

With a background in Biology and Chemistry and having done a Masters in Chemistry focusing on heavy metals, my professional trajectory has been driven by a singular focus: investigating the impact of environmental factors on human health. My unique, non-traditional path into CMNHS has affirmed the value of interdisciplinary approaches to complex health problems, offering a fresh lens on preventative healthcare and environmental toxicology. **My research focusses on evaluation and health risk assessment of heavy metals exposure among nursing mothers in Suva.** The local context is critical since, for the past two decades, there have been studies conducted in Suva confirming elevated levels of several hazardous metals in soils and sediments.

Heavy metals have attracted considerable attention because they are potent toxins and tend to accumulate in body organs and disrupt the normal functioning of body processes, paving the path for many diseases. Investigations on the occurrence of heavy metals in breast milk have been carried out around the globe; however, there have not been any studies carried out in the Pacific. The physiological problems caused by inorganic pollutants have been previously undetected; however, once the results of this research are obtained and analyzed, they will provide a valuable contribution to the Ministry of Health, enabling necessary action in policy making, awareness campaigns, diagnosis, and treatment plans.

STAFF RESEARCHER HIGHLIGHTS

Name: Osea Masilaca PGEDU, MNS [Admin], BNS, DIP.NSG
School: School of Nursing
Position: Asst. Professor Nursing Professional Department
Research Position: Chair of School of Nursing Research Committee

Research Publications (In Progress)
1. Principal Investigator – Inter School Research: "Academic Resilience Among Students at The College of Medicine, Nursing & Health Science, Fiji National University, The Republic of Fiji – A Mix-Method Study" Data Analysis Phase
2. Co- researcher: "Registered Nurses' Perception of Bioscience in the Nursing Education Curriculum – Fiji National University". Discussion of Results Phase

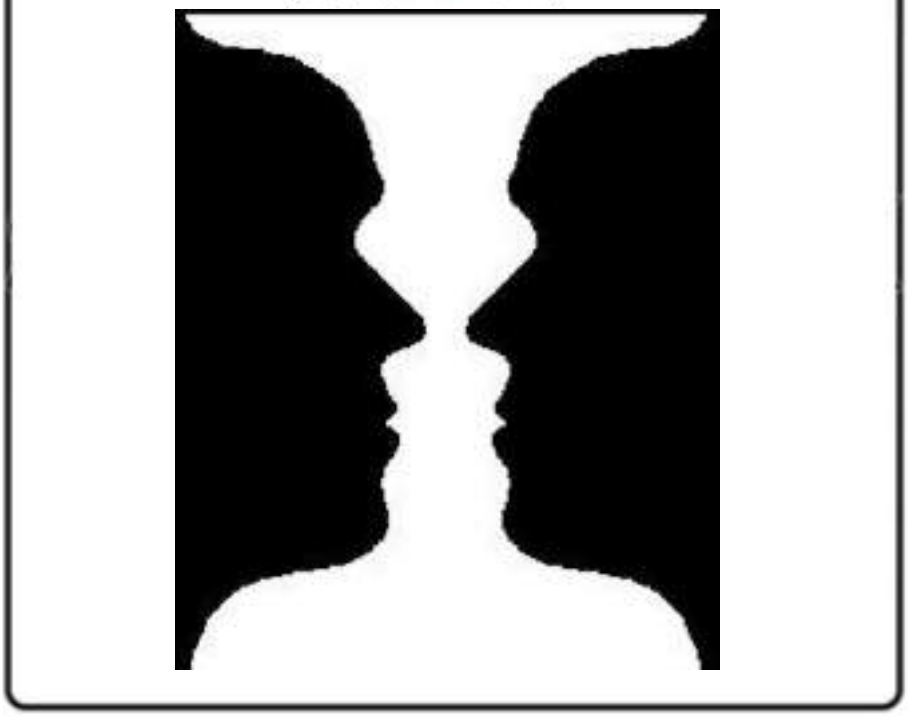
1.What is the most surprising discovery from your current work? People all over the world are reading and citing some of my studies.
2.In one sentence, what is the real-world application of your research? The real word application of the research is to inform nursing practice, nursing education and nursing leadership.
3.What is the biggest hurdle you need to overcome next?

- complete work on research topic: Academic Resilience Among CMNHS|FNU students - Mixmethod Design and at the same time pursuing PhD and reviewing proposals and manuscripts for publications.
- to master the use of software for qualitative data analysis

4.What unrelated skill is surprisingly useful in your daily research? Draw mind maps of themes from qualitative interviews
5.What common misconception should people stop believing about your field? Nursing is not only about caring or bedside nursing – Research is required to promote evidence-based nursing care
6.What is the one thing you wish the public understood better about science? Science informs on the who, what, when, where and why.

WHAT DID YOU SEE FIRST

ONE VASE OR TWO FACES?



Thank you for your time - we would love to hear from you.
For comments, suggestions or article contributions
email: irene.miller@fnu.ac.fj