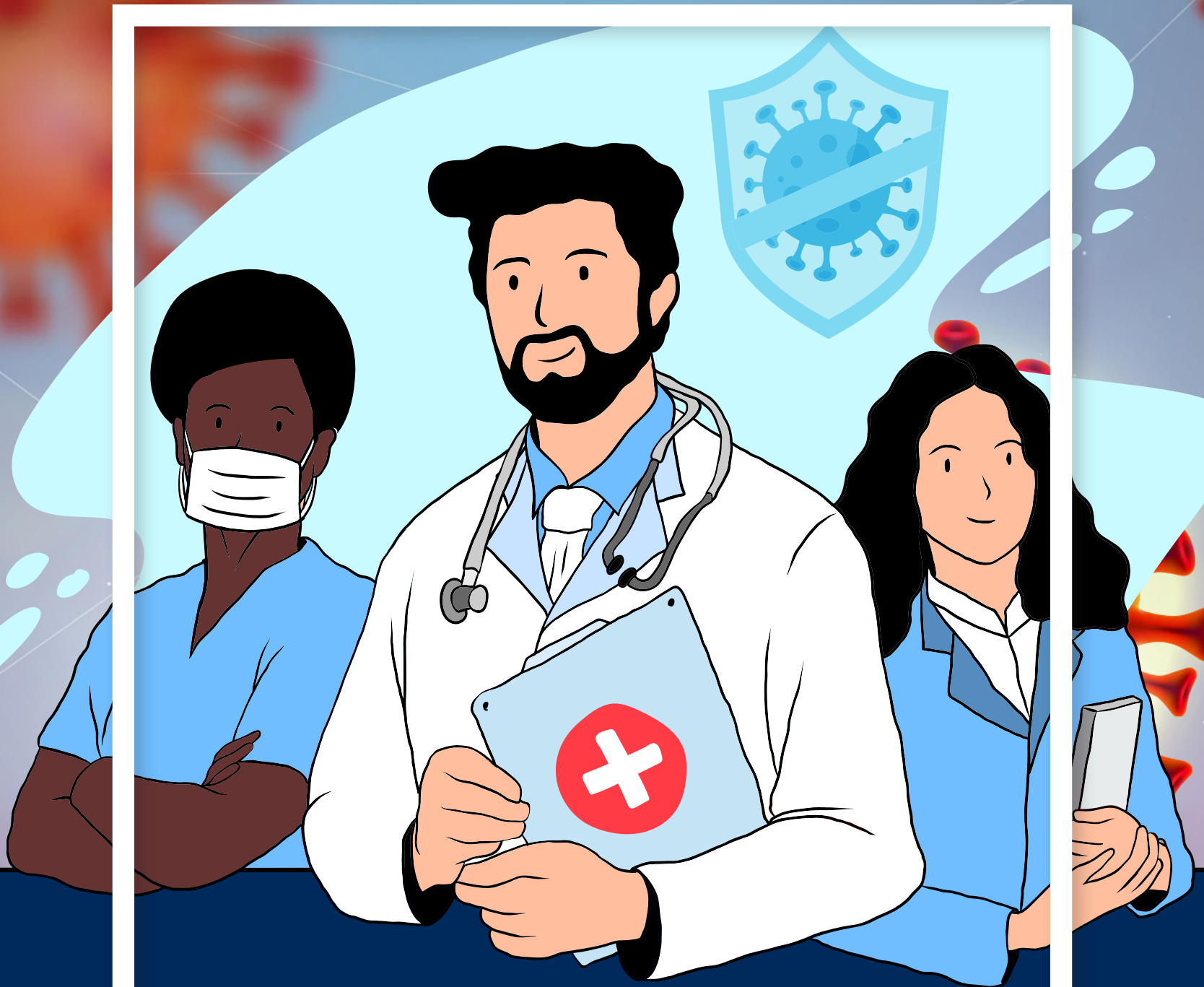


FNUUNIKUA



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OUR HEROES WEAR SCRUBS

APRIL 2020

DR BENNETT JUGGLES TEACHING,
ICU AND COVID-19 TASKFORCE ROLE

FNU PROVIDES SPECIALISED TRAINING
TO HEALTHCARE WORKERS

Dr Bennett juggles teaching, ICU and COVID19 taskforce role



Dr Elizabeth Bennett (front middle) with staff at CWM Hospital's ICU ward.

Dr Elizabeth Bennett leads a very busy life nowadays, juggling teaching obligations, clinical work and her responsibilities as a member of Fiji's national COVID-19 taskforce.

Dr Bennett is the Postgraduate Coordinator, Anaesthesia and Intensive Care Training at the Fiji National University's (FNU), College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences' (CMNHS).

She started at the institution at the then Fiji School of Medicine (FSM) in 2003 and has been teaching in her field of expertise for more than 15 years.

After a morning meeting that lasted about two hours, Dr Bennett managed to squeeze in a few minutes with the FNUNIKUA team for a quick chat before beginning her rounds at Suva's Colonial War Memorial (CWM) Hospital, Intensive Care Unit (ICU).

"My clinical teaching role includes bedside clinical teaching in the ICU at the CWM Hospital for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. As a member of the College's School of Medical Science, this role also involves a clinical and on-call service commitments to the care patients at the Ministry of Health and Medical Services' ICUs," Dr Bennett explained.

Whilst sanitising her hands before entering ICU, Dr Bennett highlights that she has taught and graduated over 78 students in the Postgraduate Anaesthesia programme and 41 training in the Anaesthesia Masters programme; a further 24 postgraduate students are still training in Anaesthesia through the FNU programmes although some have had to defer this year due to COVID-19.

"I feel very fortunate to have the opportunity to teach this talented group of individuals and have enjoyed watching them take on their roles as specialists and healthcare leaders in Fiji and within the region after leaving FNU," she said.

Dr Bennett then begins to talk about her involvement in an issue that almost every Fijian speaks of on a daily basis – the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

"I've been a member of the national COVID 19 Taskforce since it was formed on 30 January this year. We meet weekly for about two-three hours at Dinem House (Ministry of Health headquarters)."

"The taskforce discusses known evidence, advisories

from various authorities such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and current situations within the world, the region and Fiji."

"Plans and recommendations are then discussed and agreed upon with respect to how to proceed and manage the situation for the best outcome for Fiji."

Dr Bennett is also a member of the CWM Hospital clinical guideline writing committee. This committee reviewed published guidelines from various recognised authorities such as the WHO and the Australian and New Zealand Intensive Care Society (ANZICS) and then wrote the CWMH Clinical management document for Fiji's medical staff to follow that is relevant and specific to our local cases.

"I also attend meetings for planning equipment procurement for CWMH ICU hospital preparedness to help plan and quantify the resources required to be purchased by the various donor and aid groups," she said.

"This is to help in our preparedness for COVID-19 and ensure timely arrival of appropriate and sufficient resources."

While fulfilling her obligations on a national level, Dr Bennett also has her academic and medical roles to carry out daily.

"I am also part of the FNU COVID-19 taskforce that helps make evidence-based plans for our university and our student well-being."

"I still continue my clinical work at the Ministry in the ICU to help care for Suva's usual ICU patients. With the arrival of new equipment from donor aid (new high flow oxygen and ventilator machines) I've also facilitated hospital staff learning how to use them."

"Like other FNU staff, I've also continued teaching my postgraduate students, some of whom have returned to their home countries around the region and so we keep connected via the internet and software such as Zoom."

Dr Bennett added that applications such as Zoom also helped the Ministry in its COVID-19 operations.

"We use this during all our taskforce meetings so that healthcare colleagues in charge of responses in other parts of Fiji can be included in the meetings," she explained.

"Everyone is able to share on-screen presentations whilst adhering to the social distancing rules. Taskforce

members from Suva may also attend the meeting via zoom from home or another office which reduces the number of people physically present and allows social distance within the Dinem House conference room."

While most Fijians follow news updates closely and tune in to the briefings made by the Government regarding the virus, many may be living through a pandemic for the first time or be too young to recall previous pandemics.

Given her years of experience and work in the medical field, Dr Bennett highlighted that she was already working in Fiji during the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic and was involved in Fiji's epidemic responses to meningococcus, leptospirosis, typhoid, dengue, measles and influenza A.

While a pandemic is a disease that may affect multiple countries or the whole world, an epidemic is a widespread occurrence of an infectious disease in a community at a particular time.

"During the last pandemic in 2009, we were fortunate to have a good and early vaccination campaign in Fiji and therefore few ICU cases," she said.

"This influenza periodically recurs and poses a threat to young children, pregnant women and the elderly and I've have been involved in the early response to a resurgence in 2016. I've participated in the meetings to formulate Fiji's national pandemic influenza plan and taught in 2016 the WHO influenza management plan workshop in Fiji."

"For certain serious or epidemic-prone diseases, any case in ICU warns of a possible epidemic. For this reason, I am also part of a small Technical Working Group (TWG) of hospital clinicians formed by the CDC Fiji to monitor and report infections."

Reflecting on the current COVID-19 crisis, Dr Bennett said the rapid formation of the national task force and the Incident Management Team (IMT) meant measures were quickly and effectively planned to protect all Fijians.

"Advice from the WHO and lessons from other countries have also been noted and carefully planned strategies put into action," Dr Bennett said.

"We are delighted that so far, these measures appear to have avoided the devastating effects of the virus experienced in other parts of the world and I feel cautiously optimistic that if we continue to plan well, Fiji may be one of the early countries to recover."

Research specialist shares views on Coronavirus pandemic



CMNHS Associate Dean Research, Dr Donald Wilson

The Fiji National University’s (FNU) College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS) is assisting the Fijian Government to curb the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in Fiji. Dr Donald Wilson (MBBS, PhD), who is a public health physician and an Associate Professor of Epidemiology shares his perspective on the pandemic in terms of research and how the College is actively involved in the fight against the global health catastrophe, which has claimed hundreds and thousands of lives across the world, has put stress on health care systems and downturn of economies leading to unemployment and major financial losses.

1. As a public health physician and an epidemiologist, what are your thoughts on COVID-19 and its global impact?

With the lockdowns, restricted movements and the “new normal” work-from-home arrangements now in place, many of us are keeping well abreast of the evolvement of this pandemic. Since it left China in late December 2019, COVID-19 has spread to every continent except Antarctica. And we see the number of cases and deaths rising daily in Africa, the Americas and Europe.

COVID-19 is more than just a health crisis. The stress that it is creating on all systems and at all levels is likely to cause economic, social and political crises, that will last a while.

2. What about the status in the Pacific region?

Excluding Australia and New Zealand, only six countries have reported cases – Guam, Northern Marianas, Tahiti, New Caledonia, Fiji and PNG. Cases diagnosed in Fiji (18 at 27/4/2020) have all been stable, and we are very fortunate for that. Deaths have only been reported in NZ and Australia (case fatality of less than 1% for both countries). We are very fortunate that all other countries in the Pacific have not reported any cases, and we hope it stays that way.

3. As a medical expert, what is your assessment of COVID-19 cases in Fiji and Government’s response to it?

Since the announcement of Case 1 on March 19, the numbers have increased at an average of one case every one to four days. Given that all these cases were in a stable condition and not requiring critical care, they were in isolation wards and just monitored closely. As at 27/04/2020, Fiji has zero deaths and 11 patient recoveries. This highlights the Government’s significant precautions and the proactive approach towards curbing the pandemic. We can only hope that in future we don’t get to see cases that require ICU care because that will begin to show a different picture of the burden of the disease on our health system.

The Government is advised by a specially-appointed inter-disciplinary and cross-Ministry Incident Management Team (IMT), that receives health advice from the national COVID-19 Taskforce, a multi-

disciplinary team with expertise in all areas of clinical medicine and public health. From the health perspective, the Government is trying its best to respond fully to all the needs of the COVID-19 response mechanism, while not creating gaps in the delivery of all other normal services from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS) to the Fijian population. It is not perfect, but we are not in a bad place.

4. Is CMNHS supporting the national COVID-19 response? How?

Yes, it is. Some of the college staff are volunteering with the public health screening teams while our doctors and nurses that are in postgraduate clinical training programmes are part of the frontline response teams on the various clinical disciplines. Also, two of our College staff are members of the national COVID Taskforce.

5. Will CMNHS conduct any research on COVID-19 in Fiji?

We have started putting together research plans. Research provides evidence that contributes to policy, and local research generates local evidence, which even better contextualizes recommendations to policy. All responses of the Government so far to the developing COVID-19 situation has been accompanied by the development of some guideline or policy. An evaluation of the impacts of these policies is something that our College can undertake. In addition, several other topics that we could investigate is the mental health of frontline health workers, conducting descriptive analyses and finding associations and risk factors in our COVID-19 cases, ascertaining the impact of COVID-19 on NCD’s and our NCD services. There are also plans to undertake laboratory-based research, but these are just a few topics to mention.

6. From the Pacific point of view – what research activities and themes could be of importance for the governments in formulating policies and guidelines for this pandemic?

Like most public health emergencies, the COVID-19 pandemic has also proven the importance of having clear standard operating procedures (SOP’s), guidelines and policies to guide all responses. Even though most of our Pacific neighbours have not had cases, there will be great interest in how countries like Fiji have managed this

outbreak, particularly focusing on the guiding policies. So there will be a platform for comparative analyses of COVID-19 related policies. In addition, the economic and social impacts of the pandemic at all levels of society will be different across the countries of the Pacific. These differences provide critical information especially for regional or international technical agencies that support our region.

7. Do you think research findings from this pandemic could be useful in dealing with similar situations in future?

Absolutely. These are real-life exercises that test our national systems of all nature and at all levels. If we capitalize on the challenges and commit all resources available to address our gaps, which includes generating local evidence by research, we should be better prepared for any other such public health emergency in future.

8. Any other comments?

I am not too sure how we go about it, but I think there is value in investigating how and why we Fijians respond to health directives the way we do. Understanding our behaviour will help us further contextualize the health-promoting messages to suit our population, and is probably more likely to be successful.

Dr Donald Wilson is the Associate Dean - Research and Director of the new Fiji Institute of Pacific Health Research (FIPHR) at the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences’ (CMNHS) at the Fiji National University (FNU) since April 2019. Three years prior to that, he was Head of the School of Public Health and Primary Care. He is a Public Health Physician and spent 12 years in Japan where he obtained a PhD degree in the area of occupational and environmental epidemiology. His doctoral research was on respiratory health effects of ambient air pollution in industrial cities of Northeastern China. His current areas of research interest are in water-sensitive diseases and re-emerging CDs, sexual reproductive health, NCDs, particularly its disease burden and the importance of policy responses.
 Source: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Donald_Wilson5



Dr Wilson said research can better prepare countries for other public health emergencies in the future.

FNU adapts to the current crisis



Acting Vice-Chancellor Professor James Pounder

We are living in strange times, certainly, in my career as an academic which spans over 30 years, I have never experienced the degree of impact on universities worldwide that this pandemic has caused. I guess the one saving grace in all this is that universities across the globe are taking broadly common measures to cope with the social distancing requirements that are common around the world. The common factor is to replace face to face teaching with a fully online mode of instruction and FNU has done exactly the same commencing on Monday, 20 April.

Despite this common approach, FNU has its own issues with the conversion to online education and the University’s Senior Management Group (SMG) meets weekly to respond to government updates and FNU internal difficulties.

In addition to this, I have introduced a regular short

video message from me just to ensure that staff and students are aware that I am with them throughout this difficult time and to ensure them that, in time, all will be well. I say this with confidence because, while I have not experienced such an impact on universities as has been caused by COVID19, I was working in Hong Kong when the forerunner of COVID19 broke out primarily in Southeast Asia and I remained in Hong Kong for the full duration of the SARS outbreak.

So, once again, just like in the case of SARS, all will be well and Fiji will emerge from COVID19 and once again thrive; I am convinced of it!

In the meantime, however, we are dealing with present issues. One issue is in the area of pastoral care, namely caring for the students during periods of lockdown. In Natabua, students living within the lockdown area were allowed to vacate their hostel rooms and return home, but there were many who lived outside the lockdown area and were unable to leave their hostel. Although stocks of food and water were available to these students, FNU took a senior management decision to provide a breakfast and afternoon meal for students confined to the Campus to ensure that no-one went hungry. We have adopted a similar approach in Suva given that this is an ongoing situation because regional and maritime students and those who live in lockdown areas are still residing and being cared for in the hostels.

In the area of learning and teaching, I have already mentioned our strategy of delivering fully online for the duration of COVID19 pandemic or until we get further directives from the Fiji Government which relax the social distancing measures. Accordingly, the extended mid-semester break was then used by lecturers to hone their online learning and teaching skills in preparation for fully online teaching and our Centre for Flexible and E-Learning has worked overtime to ensure that FNU is ready to deliver in the online mode. Measures are also being put in place to assess the commitment to, and effectiveness of lecturers in online teaching to ensure that what is offered to students is much more than the uploading of lecture notes and Powerpoint slides.

On the student side, we are aware of issues with connectivity and our Director of ICT has negotiated special arrangements with Vodafone and Digicel to allow students to connect to FNU free of charge. We are also aware that some students may not possess suitable devices to engage fully with the online approach and other may have connectivity problems if they reside in villages.

We are gathering information on numbers and the senior management team are actively discussing approaches to dealing with these cases. Nevertheless, regardless of the issues we are facing, FNU is committed to a principle that no student will suffer academically as a result of the measures we are having to take in response to COVID19.

An associated issue is to do with assessments and it is clear that any face to face assessment will not take place and such online assessment as do take place will primarily be used to identify and address gaps in student learning and not used for discontinuation of studies. Furthermore, where there is a practical element to assessment that necessarily cannot be carried out on line, these will be deferred until conditions allow for them to take place.

In conclusion, I am convinced that FNU’s responses to the difficulties we are facing will enable the University to emerge as a much more flexible, nimble institution engaging in a form of learning, primarily blended, which has all the hallmarks of a modern approach to learning and teaching. Equally as a University that has had staff and students pulling together during this time,

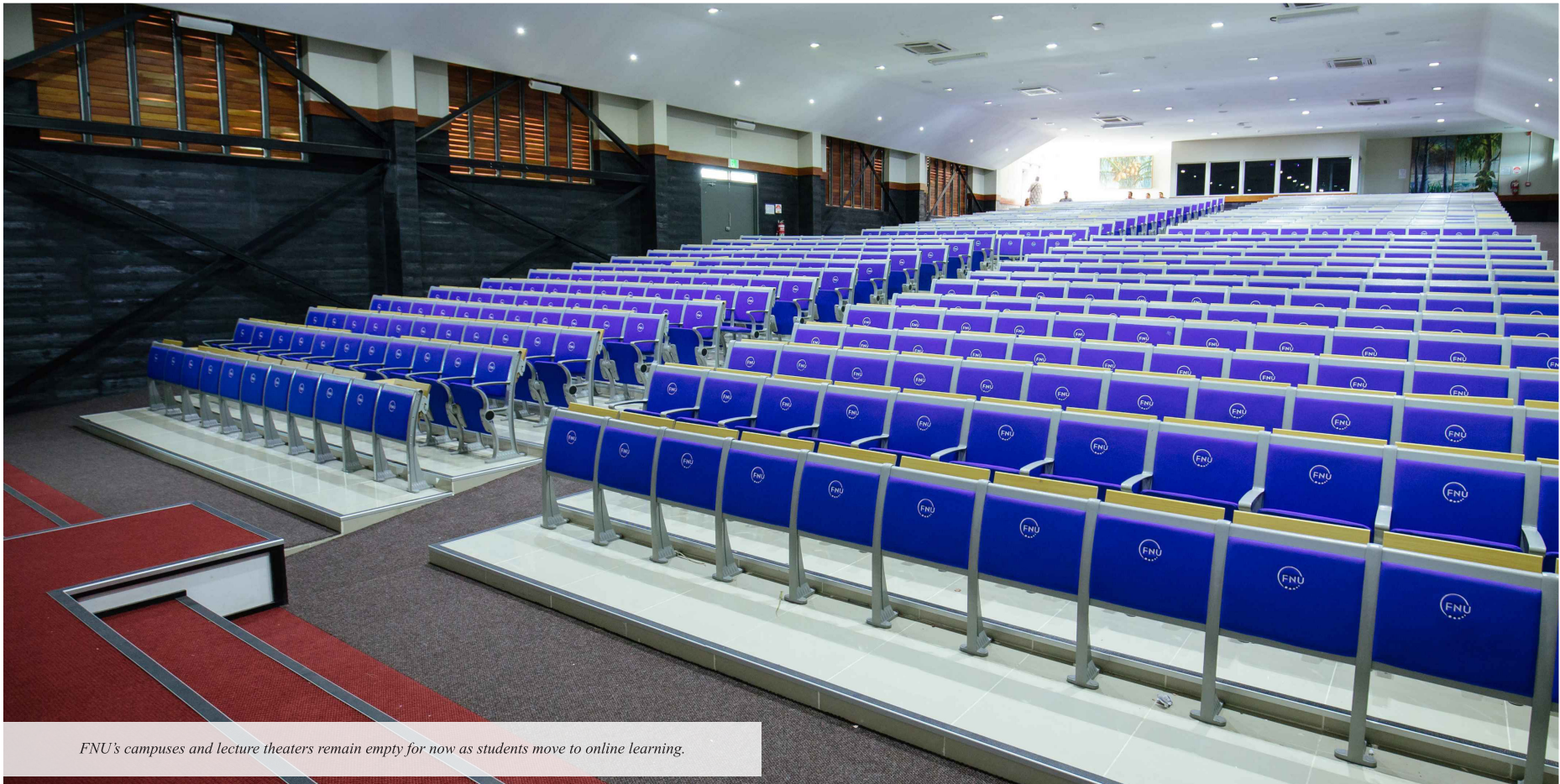
I believe we will be a much more cohesive and caring academic community as a result of needed to respond to COVID19.

Professor James Pounder
Acting Vice-Chancellor
Fiji National University



FNU students pre-COVID19. All students have now been studying from home through online learning.

Learning and teaching during COVID-19



FNU's campuses and lecture theaters remain empty for now as students move to online learning.

The dry leaves and debris picked up and scattered by the wind on the lawn is the only sound rustling through the empty corridors of Fiji National University's (FNU) Campuses and Centres across the country.

The country's national university has been closed for over a month since the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) was detected in Fiji.

COVID-19 in Fiji

On March 19, the day Fiji's Prime Minister Honourable Voreqe Bainimarama officially announced the first patient to test positive for COVID-19, FNU had just completed its March graduation ceremony for Labasa Campus students in the North.

Staff, students, parents and loved ones celebrated the joyous occasion, breaking out into song and dance at the Labasa Civic Centre and smiling for the countless pictures taken.

However, at the back of their minds, everyone made a mental note to tune in to the PM's announcement, which would be broadcasted live on all media stations later that day.

In a side room at the Centre, the outgoing Vice-Chancellor, Professor Nigel Healey, Pro Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching (who is now FNU's Acting Vice-Chancellor), Professor James Pounder and some College Deans quickly assessed the situation and called for a Senior Management Group (SMG) meeting once they returned to Suva that evening.

Lautoka lockdown

By 7pm, staff and students in the Greater Lautoka Area were informed that the Natabua Campus, Naceva Centre and Technical College of Fiji (TCF) campuses would be closed immediately. Staff were encouraged to work from home, and students advised to remain at home unless they were hostel students accommodated at the campuses. This was in line with Government's announcement that Lautoka City was to be placed on lockdown for the next two weeks.

Students at other campuses were also directed to stay home and begin their mid-semester break earlier than the scheduled date of 23 March.

Transition to online delivery of teaching

All FNU staff also began working from home and slowly made the transition to the online delivery of learning.

FNU Assistant Lecturer in Environmental Science, Lia Bogitini, said while they had to cancel several field trips scheduled to be taken by students as part of their learning, she had devised a new approach to teaching for the rest of

the semester.

"I will provide new labs that will consist of YouTube videos, DIY (Do-It-Yourself) activities students can do in their own homes with their available resources and virtual simulations relevant to the topics covered in the course outline," Bogitini said.

"These will be made available to the students through Moodle. These assessments will not have a penalty or due date before week 14."

"We are also providing online quizzes for the students that won't have any penalties or due dates and have removed the attendance component of the course."

Students' experiences

A week later, a ban on inter-island passenger travel was announced, dampening the spirits of many students who had planned to return to their homes in the outer islands. However, everyone understood the reasons for this measure, as the Government worked to ensure the spread of the virus did not reach the maritime region.

Bachelor of Hospitality and Hotel Management student Ana Judith Tabuau said she began following the social distancing directives by remaining at home whilst keeping in touch with her family, friends and lecturers through electronic communication.

"I also kept myself updated by following the FNU social media pages as well as the information given out by the Government and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services," she said.

"While I could not return home to Savusavu for my break, I was able to catch up on my studies as all my lecture notes and teachings were updated on Moodle."

Bachelor of Commerce (Industrial Relations and Human Resource Management) student Upasana Kiran added that she was lucky to have been able to travel home to Savusavu from Labasa Campus.

The final-year student encouraged others to be like her and play an active role in preventing the spread of the virus.

"I wash my hands regularly for about 20 seconds with soap and water and carry my sanitizer when I step out of the house," Kiran said.

"I make sure to stay at least two metres away from others when I have to do shopping or marketing in town."

"I also make sure my family and I follow the nationwide curfew from 10pm to 5am and stay indoors."

Suva lockdown

By the first week of April, Fiji had seven active COVID-19 patients. Circumstances surrounding the movement of some of the patients prompted the Government to place the Suva-Nausori corridor on lockdown for two weeks.

Bachelor of Science in Agriculture student Maikeli Vosaki Tuinasavusavu, who studies at the College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (CAFF) at Koronivia Campus said being a hostel student that could not travel home to Ba meant that he relied on FNU to continue accommodating him.

"The University made sure all hostel students were taken care of and as students, we also looked out for each other during this time of crisis," the 21-year-old said.

"We usually tune it to the television or radio to keep ourselves updated on what's happening around the world and here in Fiji during these uncertain times."

Staying connected

Ba Campus Coordinator, Nikleshwar Datt said the various online software and applications available made it easier to keep in touch with other staff as well as the students.

"Youtube is there for videos which we can share with our students, Zoom is available for an online classroom learning environment and we also encourage staff to record and upload voice recordings for their students," Datt said.

"Since our students are tech-savvy and most have mobile devices, I have also created a Viber group with students for the units that I am teaching and students use this as a sort of discussion forum to raise all their queries."

College of Humanities and Education (CHE), Lecturer in Linguistics at the School of Communication, Language & Literature, Prashneel Goundar added that students should create their own timetables to follow at home to keep track of their self-directed learning hours and ensure they cover everything required.

"As more universities globally are moving towards online teaching mode, our students should take advantage of the way this semester will progress and engage in their learning more accommodatingly," Goundar said.

Way forward

After being on break for a month, FNU students have resumed online learning for the rest of the semester as everyone slowly adapts to this 'new normal' of working and learning remotely.

As at 27 April, the Prime Minister tweeted that only seven of the total number of 18 patients were confirmed to be still COVID-19-positive.

As Fijians breathe a sigh of relief and hope that things are turning out for the better, everyone is encouraged to continue practising social distancing, staying home and using sanitizers or washing their hands with soap and water for about 20 seconds.

Together, we can all help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Fiji.



FNU academic Dr Lavinesh Raj (right) conducts training for Emergency staff at the CWM Hospital.

FNU provides specialised training to health care workers

Health care workers dealing with the spread of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Fiji undergo specialised training before joining the frontline to fight COVID-19. Part of this training is provided by experienced staff at the Fiji National University's (FNU) College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences' (CMNHS).

The Emergency Medicine academics at CMNHS' Department of Medical Sciences' – which comprises of Dr Lavinesh Raj, Dr Dennis Lee and Dr Arveen Maharaj – have taken a significant step in training the health workers who are at risk of exposure to coronavirus through their work duties.

“Individuals who serve the public during emergencies like these need skills to protect their own health, as they are exposed to contaminated materials and potentially infected people,” mentioned Dr Raj.

“Correct use of the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is one area that we are focusing on. Apart from this, we are also training the health care workers on aerosol safety when dealing with those who show symptoms of coronavirus,” said the FNU academic.

The training, which mostly involves practical sessions, were held at FNU's Hoodless House and the Colonial War Memorial (CWM) Hospital, with both Emergency doctors and nurses attending in groups of four to five people. More than 90% of the staff in the Emergency Department have undergone this training.

“These men and women are so dedicated, and as they work to serve and protect the public during this COVID-19 pandemic, we want to make sure they know how to protect their own health too,” elaborated Dr Raj.

The team adheres to the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines to ensure

precautions are implemented to protect the health workers and the community.

“We do not want any of our health care workers or hospital staff to get sick, so we have been encouraging them to practice the attitude of prioritising safety,” he added.

“We want to ensure that when dealing with a potentially infected patient, the health care workers wear their masks, long-sleeve gown, eye protection and gloves correctly.”

“We also advise them to conduct procedures in a separate or an isolated room to decrease the risk of COVID-19 transmissions,” he mentioned.

Dr Raj said his team has received an overwhelming response from the staff at the CWM Hospital who were part of this important training.

The team will continue to conduct specialised training for medical staff serving on the frontline in the fight against COVID-19.

How can I grocery shop safely in the time of COVID-19?



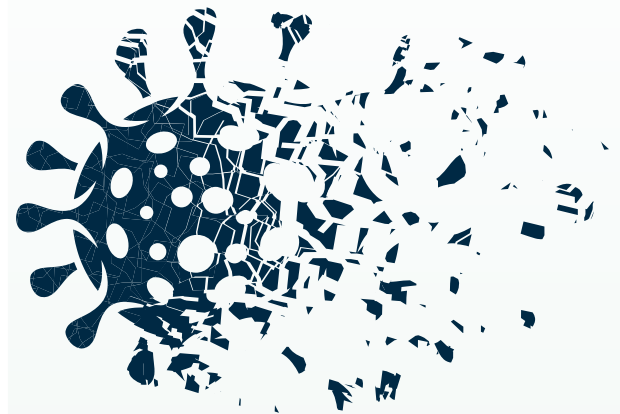
When grocery shopping, keep at least 1-metre distance from others and avoid touching your eyes, mouth and nose. If possible, sanitize the handles of shopping trolleys or baskets before shopping. Once home, wash your hands thoroughly and also after handling and storing your purchased products.

There is currently no confirmed case of COVID-19 transmitted through food or food packaging.

Tips and Facts regarding (COVID-19)

Reduce your risk of COV-19 infection

- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water or use hand sanitizer
- Don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth
- Cover your cough and sneeze with tissue or an elbow
- Keep over 1-2m distance from others - avoid shaking hands, kissing and hugging

Be **SMART** & inform yourself about #coronavirus

- Follow accurate public health advice from WHO & your local health authority
- Follow the news on latest coronavirus updates
- To avoid spreading rumors, always check the source you are getting information from
- Don't spread rumors

Learn more to Be **READY** for #COVID19:
www.who.int/COVID-19

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

E tabu na soqoni
Kakua na veisikovi

TIKO I VALE

Duri se dabe veiyawaki me rauta e rua na mita

E tabu na lululu se na veimokoti



Source: World Health Organization

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Bheer mei mat jayiye
Mahemaan ko mat bulayiye

G HAR PAR HI RAHIYE

Ek dusre se 2 metres dooriya rakhiye

Haath aur gale mat milaye



Source: World Health Organization

COVID-19 Know The Facts

COVID-19 spreads primarily from person to person

- Droplets released when someone sick sneezes or coughs can land on the mouths or noses of people nearby
- Close contact with someone sick – like hugging or shaking hands

COVID-19 mainly spreads from person to person But it can also be left on objects and surfaces...

So if you touch something contaminated and then touch your face or another's face, you might all fall ill.

Reduce your risk of COVID-19

- Clean your hands often
- Cough or sneeze in your bent elbow – not your hands!
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Limit social gatherings and time spent in crowded places
- Avoid close contact with someone who is sick
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces



COVID-19 in numbers

The World Health Organization (WHO) shows the following situation in numbers as of Tuesday, 28 April 2020:

Globally

2 954 222 confirmed (76 026) | 202 597 deaths (3932)

European Region

1 386 693 confirmed (27 313) | 126 429 deaths (1904)

Region of the Americas

1 179 607 confirmed (39 087) | 60 211 deaths (1722)

Eastern Mediterranean Region

171 238 confirmed (5305) | 7148 deaths (157)

Western Pacific Region

145 385 confirmed (1264) | 5998 deaths (40)

South-East Asia Region

48 348 confirmed (2288) | 1917 deaths (93)

African Region

22 239 confirmed (769) | 881 deaths (16)

WHO RISK ASSESSMENT

Global Level Very High

Note: Figures in bracket reflect the new cases in the last 24 hours.

SOURCES: World Health Organization (WHO), Fijian Government

Medical Laboratory Scientists – The Unseen Warriors

Jignesh Sharma’s ambition is to make a difference in Fiji’s health sector. This mission led the dedicated Fiji National University (FNU) alumnus to a career as a Medical Laboratory Scientist.

Medical Laboratory Scientists play a critical role in the health sector. They assist doctors in determining diagnosis by analysing patients’ blood and other bodily fluids and tissues. Doctors then use these results to advise patients about the course of treatment. Unlike doctors, however, these practitioners spend most of their time in their labs - away from the public eye.

“We remain hidden behind the closed doors of the lab donning our white coats like unseen warriors,” says Sharma.

Recalling his days as a student in the Bachelors in Medical Laboratory Science programme at FNU’s College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS), Sharma says, “My student life was inspiring. I was privileged to be taught by skilled lecturers. I was quite an active student and was a member of many student associations, including the Fiji School of Medicine Student Association (FSMedSA) and the Fiji National University Student Association (FNUSA). I also served as the President of the Medical Laboratory Science Students Association (MLSSA), which is the student body of Medical Laboratory Science students.”

Sadly, it was during his time as a student at FNU when his father passed away.

“I had a tough time during my final year of studies when my father passed away. The final year of studies is crucial and probably the most difficult, and it is easy to lose track when tragedy strikes. It was a very challenging year, but I was determined and made my parents proud.”

After graduating with Bachelors in Medical Laboratory Science from FNU in 2017, Sharma joined the Colonial War Memorial Hospital (CWMH) as a volunteer Laboratory Technician before securing a job as the Laboratory Technician In-Charge at the Levuka Sub-Divisional Hospital on the island of Ovalau.



“As the Lab Technician In-Charge, my job was to oversee the work of the lab. I performed a range of duties from reporting to assessing quality checks of samples to doing stock-takes. I also organised successful blood drives in the Lomaiviti Sub-Division.”

After serving for a little over a year in



Ovalau, Sharma moved back to Suva to be with his mother where he joined the Bulabula Mapei Research as their Project Officer Laboratory. The Bulabula Mapei Research is a project run by the Murdoch Children Research Institute, and, Live & Learn Fiji.

The project is a randomised controlled trial in Fiji which examines the effect of a single oral dose of an antibiotic called azithromycin which is given to women in labour to reduce maternal pathogen carriage and lower infection risk in both mother and infant.

Although work keeps him busy, Sharma has not lost sight of his mission to make a lasting difference to Fiji’s health sector. Four months ago, Sharma and one of his friends who is in the IT field started a health-based software company, Medinformatics PTE Ltd, to take information management in the health sector to greater

heights. They aim to design a software that is user-friendly, meets the needs of the local health sector, and is affordable.

“My friend and I combined the knowledge of both of our fields, and it all fell into place. Our software is tailor made to suit the requirements of our clients. We are pretty new at the moment, however, we are very lucky as we managed to secure a few international clients.”

Sharma’s message to students and fresh graduates is to stay focused.

“Staying focused will remind you of your goal and in turn, help you to stay on the right track. There will be hurdles in the way, but they can surely be overcome by keeping the end goal in mind.”

Sharma is currently pursuing a Post Graduate Diploma in Health Service Management at FNU.

The Fiji National University’s Nikua is a monthly newsletter which aims to promote the University’s activities to the wider community. This newsletter is produced by the University Marketing and Communications team. For views or comments please email mprc@fnu.ac.fj or contact 3394000.

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FNU NIKUA wants to hear from you

FNU NIKUA welcomes submissions by staff and students for publication in the newsletter. Please send your suggestions, comments or articles for consideration to mprc@fnu.ac.fj



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