

IMA sends doctor on medical Mission to Vanuatu

As part of the IMA's activities to strengthen relations between physicians and the community, and within the framework of collaboration between the government of the Republic of Vanuatu and the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Yitzhak Kinog embarked on a medical mission to the Vanuatu Islands in November 2007. Dr. Kinog is providing consulting and treatment services to the local population.

Dr. Kinog is a family physician, Head of Clalit Health Services Haifa Administration and a family physician who also practices geographic medicine in Clalit Health Services "Lametayel Clinic" in Haifa. Dr. Kinog deals in management and holds a Master's degree in health system management.

Dr. Kinog's experience in the Vanuatu Islands is described below.

Chapter 1

I arrived in Vanuatu several days ago. We landed at Port Vila on the Island of Efate.

We were welcomed by a local band and by the Honorary Consul of Israel in the Islands, Mr. Goodwin Ligo, and by Irin from the Ministry of Health.

The next day I met with the Ministry of Health team, the WHO representative on the Island, the Vanuatu Minister of Health and the managers of the central hospital in Port Vila – Vanuatu Central Hospital.

Before heading north I visited the tiny island of Iririki and met with several friends of Israel from the local "Shalom" club. It turns out that they know a lot about us and really love Israel!

On Wednesday evening I flew to Luganville on the northern Island of Santo. This is the second largest city on the Vanuatu Islands, with a population of about 20,000. It is also the location of the Northern District Hospital in which I work. I was welcomed by Temta, director of the hospital and by Dr. Santos who is responsible for the hospital's medical services and a surgeon at the hospital.

I was housed in a modest apart-

ment above a gasoline station not far from the hospital. I purchased a bicycle from the Chinese store below that serves me quite well as a means of transportation.

The next day I was given a tour of the hospital that included several departments: surgery, operating room, gynecology/obstetrics, children, internal medicine and a department treating tuberculosis. The hospital employs three physicians: a surgeon, a pediatrician and a general practitioner. The hospital serves the residents of the island as well as those residing on the islands in the northern district, a total population of more than 60,000 individuals. On the other islands there are "clinics" staffed with a nurse practitioner, and when necessary patients are referred to the central hospital by plane or boat...

I began working in the internal medicine department and already made my rounds in the department. Along with me in the department there are medical students from England, including Ziad who is from Iraq.

The spoken language is Bislama – an interesting tribal English. For example urine = pish pish, bowel movement = sit sit, painful = sur, cough =

cof. As for the weather – this is the hot and rainy season.

Chapter 2

This is my second week in Luganville on the northern island of Santo, in the Northern District Hospital in which I am working.

I began working in the internal medicine department, including doctor's rounds and an outpatient clinic. Equipment is limited with minimal imaging facilities. The lab does not conduct some tests because they are out of reagents. It is not easy, but we get by...

There is a lot of work at the hospital. As I am basically the only general practitioner on the staff they use my services quite often and even call me when necessary in the evenings. Thus I got the hang of things very quickly and perform everything that is necessary, also issuing doctor certificates.

Varied local agricultural produce is sold at the local market, including different kinds of roots. This is where I met Jackie who concocts "potions" for various types of illnesses, eye problems, intestinal ailments, etc. He told me about his extensive experience and gave me some tips.

A little about the patients:

There are many cases of “fish poisoning”. The symptoms are stomach pains, vomiting, diarrhea, decreased blood pressure and slow pulse. Treatment includes administering Atropine, antihistamines and steroids. Significant improvement is usually achieved within 24 hours. I am gaining experience on this issue...

Returning asthma patients – I try to guide them and encourage the use of aspirators even for preventive treatment, and they are definitely willing to try – I hope they persist in their use. Patients that are released are invited to come back for follow-up after several days in order to check their condition.

Several days ago we set out to visit the neighboring island, Malo so I could closely observe the situation in clinics operating far from the hospital. Malo, along with the nearby Santo, comprises the Sanma District (signifying the names of the two islands – Santo and Malo).

At the local district offices we met Robert, the paramedic responsible for the clinic on the Island. We took boxes of equipment and a cooler with inoculations and traveled to the wharf on the eastern area of Santo. A small motorboat arrived after about 15 minutes loaded with sacks of copra – dried coconut “meat” used for an entire industry and the source of income for many families. After the sacks were unloaded we were on our way.

The health center pickup truck awaited us. There are no paved roads in Malo, only a dirt road encircling the island along the shore that can only be traversed by 4X4 vehicles. The island’s health center serves about 3,000 residents. It is a semi-clinic staffed by a midwife and a male nurse or paramedic treating the population 24 hours a day.

There is a delivery room next to the clinic, a hospitalization room for women that delivered and a room for the midwife in which she examines pregnant women once a month up to the birth and deals in health education, family planning, distributes contraceptives, etc. In effect this is a well-baby clinic with an adjacent delivery room...

When I arrived, several patients



Dr. Yitzhak Kinog tending to the children of Vanuatu

were already waiting. A woman with high blood pressure, another woman with knee pain, a woman with a lump in her neck and a young man suffering from chronic, 10-year back pain that radiated to his legs. His condition worsened recently and it appeared to be a problem in the lumbar spine. I promised to check his file at the hospital and summon him for additional exams.

I joined the medical team touring the island. Fortunately it was the day they circled the island to supplement inoculation equipment and to visit distant villages. The equipment was loaded on the pickup truck and we were joined by several assistants.

We traveled a road in the thick of the jungle along the coast. Everything was green and the vegetation was lush. Our first stop was a first aid post. We gave them a box with equipment. The second stop – a family with several children, a routine visit. We equipped ourselves with two large watermelons. The third stop – a local restaurant that prepares food for children after school. Two mothers were waiting for us to inoculate their children. One baby was 6 months old with stings and severe scratch marks from scabies. The infant had never been to the clinic and in fact was not inoculated since birth. The mothers brought updated inoculation cards and everything was recorded.

After administering the inoculations we continued along the road towards

the eastern part of the island. The road was lined with pineapple trees, and the landscape included bridges, small streams and many coconut groves. They showed me the ovens in which the copra is dried in order to produce copra, as well as a large flock of bats.

Along the coast – another stop, a small local clinic – a dispensary, in a farm near the coast. The next stop was a family farm with several infants that had to be inoculated. I examined almost the entire family. The adults had knee problems, osteoarthritis. The people have to walk long distances with a heavy load. Some had sores on their feet and vascular problems. I helped a little with advice and some with medications I had with me. I examined a young woman with a large goiter that was about to undergo surgery and a young man with chest pain...

I understood that I would not get back to Santo in daylight. Night fell on Malo (there is no electricity and the residents use kerosene lamps and few solar stations). We reached the island clinic after seven in the evening. Complete darkness. Robert organized a boat ride back with some local men. We agreed on the price and were on our way. A boat trip at night, in total darkness, in a small motor boat was something I had never experienced... I had not known that there are so many stars and that you could see a halo of distant galaxies. Amazing. ■