



SMOL TOKTOK BLONG ViVa



March 2015

Newsletter of the Victoria-Vanuatu Physician Project

Salu Salu Long ViVa WOW!

With financial support from ViVa, the Lenakel Hospital staff organized an impressive and heart-felt ceremony for the end of the ViVa project on Tanna. The February 2nd event was well-attended by government officials, community representatives, Tanna Chiefs, Lenakel Hospital staff and families, other Tanna ex-pats, and a kastam dance-troupe from Yakel.

Many staff and volunteers spent hours preparing food, slaughtering and cooking a pig and a goat, and decorating the new Women's Skill Centre for the event. Women wore their finest island dresses. Families came from afar and sat in the shade of the hospital trees.



Nurses Suzanne, Naumu, Natalie stand before the flower laes to be given to dignitaries

ViVa was represented at the Salusalu by outgoing Tanna doctor, Jeff Unger, with his wife Carla, and their two girls, Maryn and Neeve, as well as Dr. Colin Tamboline and his wife Joyce Wautier, Drs. Eugene Leduc and Lisa Veres, and Dr. Michael Pilgrim with his wife Lorna Way. The Government of Vanuatu was represented by the Minister of Health, the Director General of Health, the Prime Minister's personal advisor. Vila Central Hospital was represented by ni-Van surgeon, Dr. Basil, and senior registrar Dr. Annette. Other representatives were the President of TAFEA Province and the Mayor of Lenakel. A procession of the honored guests preceded the ceremony which was ably mastered by nurse Simon. Speeches could be heard all over the hospital grounds via the public address system.



From left: Carla and Dr. Jeff Unger, Lorna Way and Dr. Mike Pilgrim, Drs. Eugene Leduc and Lisa Veres, Joyce Wautier, rest of the dignitaries, and Zoe, the "dog blo Dokta"

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The Chief of the Tanna Council of Chiefs started the ceremony by welcoming the guests. He announced the creation of a Tanna community Health Trust Fund and challenged the Government to match community donations. In a moving display, many from the audience came forward to put money into the basket. ViVa was then greatly honored that a group of 60 dancers from Yakel put on an amazing performance and kindly allowed Dr. Jeff and Carla's two daughters to dance as well.

There followed many prayers and speeches expressing gratitude to ViVa and the "people of Canada". Nurse and acting Hospital Administrator, Robert Moise, gave a very fired up and strongly worded speech intended for the Minister of Health's ears, asking for more resources and payment reform, but he also gave a very touching goodbye and tribute to ViVa.

Dr. Colin Tamboline, spoke in Bislama on behalf of ViVa. He gave a brief history of ViVa, explained why the project was ending, and said "wan bigfela tank yu lo evriwan long Tanna", with a plea for "evri man-Tanna mo evri woman-Tanna" to continue working to improve health care in TAFEA and support the future ni-Van doctors.



Dr. Colin Tamboline

Then the Minister of Health stood up and thanked ViVa and responded to Robert's concerns as best as he could promising significant reforms by June. He introduced the NiVan registrar, Sale, who is the first replacement for the ViVa doctor.



Vanuatu Minister of Health

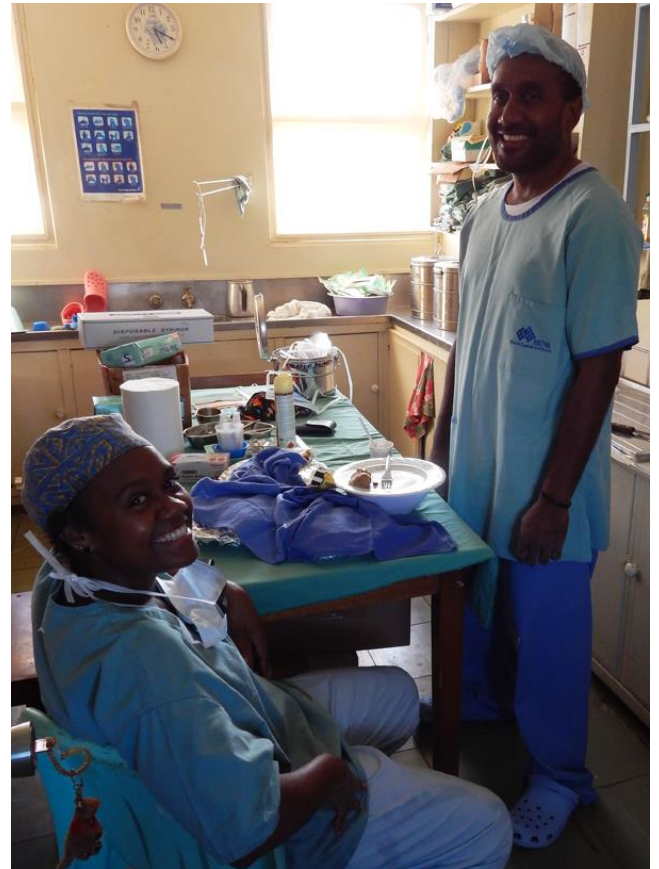
Stevie from the lab, together with his wife, nurse Natalie and other family members, sang the most incredible goodbye song in harmony that they had composed for ViVa! A thank-you plaque was presented by Lenakel Hospital to the ViVa Doctors and the Minister of Health unveiled a commemorative plaque listing all the previous ViVa doctors on the side of the hospital wall. Afterwards "wan bigfela kakae" was served and the ViVa guests passed out the photo-memory books and socialized with all the staff and visitors. In the words of Dr. Colin, it was "an intense, exhausting, tearful, hopeful, HOT, satisfying afternoon. We were all exhausted at the end of it". Joyce summed it up by saying, "Salu salu long ViVa, WOW!"

After ViVa – Who Will Follow?

After the news that Dr. Johnson and his wife, Dr. Wilma, who had been living and working on Tanna for the last year were being transferred off the island, ViVa was very concerned about who would follow in the ViVa doctor's footsteps. It was gratifying and touching, but also reassuring, to witness the profound response on Tanna to the news that the ViVa Project was ending. For example, all the Chiefs of Tanna signed a petition to the Vanuatu Government requesting a continuation of the ViVa project and requesting more resources for Lenakel Hospital. In response to this seemingly unprecedented political pressure, the Vanuatu Minister of Health, asked a ni-Van surgeon, Dr. Basil, to urgently devise a medical staffing plan for Lenakel Hospital. Dr. Basil was a good choice for this task because when he was a junior resident 6 years ago, he actually spent time on Tanna with the ViVa Doctor. He is also in charge of residency education at Port Vila hospital.

Before the Salusalu, Dr. Basil flew to Tanna with Dr. Annette, a senior ni-Van resident who had spent a year on Tanna. He met with Dr. Jeff and the rest of the ViVa doctors to reveal his plan to have two senior ni-Van residents spend 2 – 4 weeks on Tanna in overlapping rotations for the next 12 months. After several hours of discussion about his plan, its apparent political backing, and its budget, the ViVa doctors concluded that this was the best arrangement that could be verbalized with any degree of certainty at this time.

Dr. Sale, the first senior resident to arrive on Tanna was introduced at the Salusalu and seems to be a very fine and enthusiastic young man. A cohort of ni-Van students will soon be graduating from a Cuban medical school and will help relieve the shortage of doctors in Vanuatu.



Drs. Annette and Basil at Lenakel Hospital

ViVa Donates Truck and Household Goods

ViVa has handed the Doctor's House back to Lenakel Hospital in good condition to be used by whoever is the Tanna doctor. The House furnishings, kitchenware, appliances, and linen have been retained in the house for use by the occupants. Kathleen and Owen, who were providing housekeeping and gardening services for the ViVa doctors, will be retained and paid by the ni-Van residents. Rotary Australia has agreed to continue supporting the maintenance of the House and guesthouse. The Doctor's truck, purchased 2 years ago, will remain as ViVa property until the duty-free status expires and it can be re-sold. Meanwhile it will be stored at Whitegrass Resort and used by Rotary Australia in their continued good work in support of the hospital, dispensaries and schools of Tanna.



Kathleen is given a “severance package” on behalf of ViVa for her many years of housekeeping service

Where to ViVa?

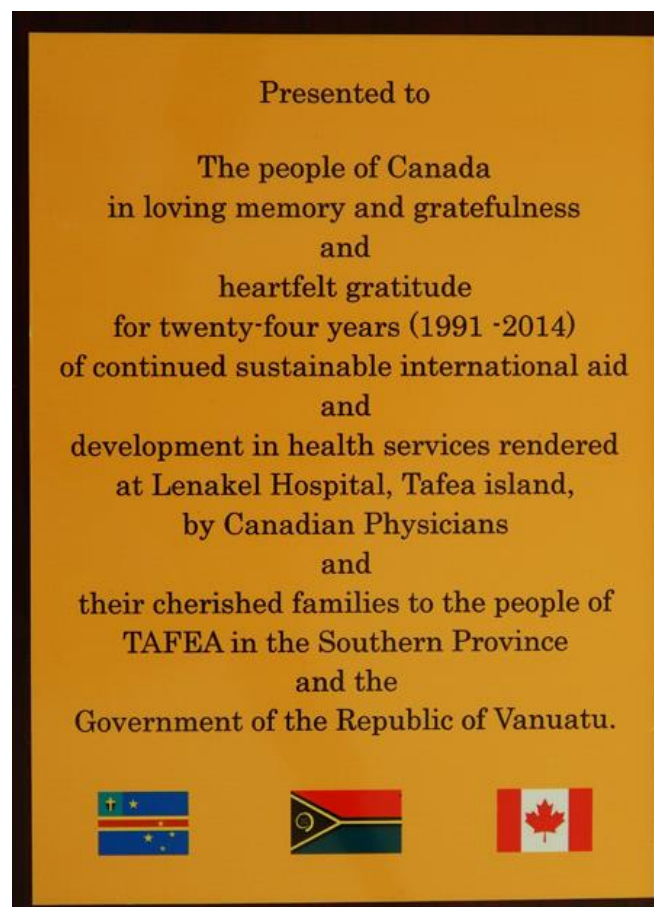
Everyone is invited to participate in the conversation about the future of ViVa. The Victoria-Vanuatu Physician Association remains a registered non-profit charity for now. Its members collectively hold important knowledge and unique experience that could be useful to others. ViVa could continue to exist but with a different mandate. ViVa encourages anyone with thoughts on this to share them with another member, email to info@vivaproject.ca, or better yet, attend a meeting. Meeting times and locations are posted on the ViVa website, www.ViVaProject.ca

Victoria Salusalu Coming Soon!

A local celebration of ViVa will be held this summer. Please stay in touch, watch the website, or attend a meeting to help us celebrate in Victoria.

Next ViVa Meeting

The next ViVa meeting will be at noon, Sunday, March 29th, 2015 at Sean and Andrea’s house. We will be welcoming Jeff and Carla and children home, reviewing the Tanna Salu Salu, planning a Victoria celebration, and discussing the future of ViVa . All alumni are invited. More information and RSVP to President@vivaproject.ca



Plaque presented as a gift to ViVa from Lenakel Hospital