

Two weeks of Public Health Attachment at Viseisei Sai Health Centre (VSHC)



VSHC Clinic outreach bus

“Love all serve all” is a theme that should be engraved in the hearts of men no matter what aspect of the service we are in; this is in light of our roles and responsibilities as individuals, community and as a nation. The first day my colleague Fane Rabici and I arrived at Viseisei Sai Health Centre as part of our attachment as final year students in medical school, we noticed this motto being part of the day-to day conduct of the Health Centre. I for one did not have the slightest clue about what would be expected of us

in our two- week rotation nor did I give it much thought. During my six years in the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Science, public health was viewed as an opportunity for field trips, sightseeing and even though screening and health education were done the basis and significance of what was carried out was not contemplated upon.

Moreover the Ottawa Charter, Alma Ata with Healthy Island Settings and MDG goals were just glanced through for passing purposes. My focus was all about acquiring the knowledge on treatment of the diseases, therefore not allowing myself to view health holistically, my mind had not opened up to the concept of addressing health from all aspects and sectors that is available to us, whereby inclusion of our own people in the step towards not only health but wellness is crucial. However what was not expected was that a platform would be established that would reform my outlook on preventive health and its importance, and how empowering the people to take control of their own health is a key to combating lifestyle related diseases.

Following the day of our arrival at Viseisei Sai Health Centre, we had the privilege of meeting with Professor Gyaneshwar who received us with warmth and kindness and in the conversation that followed we were introduced to aspects of public health and wellness, which was to be further nurtured by the events that followed and the people we met in the following days. On our very first day at Viseisei Sai Health Centre we met with our supervisor Doctor Finau who from our first encounter was very passionate in advocating preventative health and wellness. She took us on a tour of the place and introduced us to the staff who were very friendly and welcoming.

During our tour we noticed that the health centre had a backyard garden with a volley ball court a way of promoting nutrition and physical activity. To our surprise during our orientation we were required to sit in in a special outpatient clinic, Gynaecology clinic, involve ourselves at the pharmacy, Health education sector but we were not required to see outpatient. In addition we were encouraged to read on certain topics such as Alma Ata, Ottawa Charter and Healthy Settings including the Health Centre's Reproductive Health and Annual reports. That same day we also had lunch from the garden, the cabbage with dhania and chilly in hot water and 'wala (voila)' lunch was ready, it was really new for us having such a healthy meal but surprisingly it tasted really nice- 'not joking'.

In the days that followed we got involved in health education and screening both in the community setting, villages and at Vishnu Deo School. Clinic days involved reproductive health, and snap education in the morning in the health centre and later sitting in with Dr Swaran Naidu and Dr Nandan. During their clinics we were motivated to look from a public health perspective in terms of health education and social determinants of health. We even had the opportunity of sitting with young women of Viseisei village during workshop at VSHC, facilitated by Empower Pacific on "Parenting". Every day we were humbled to be associated with committed health educators, nurses and community health workers in screening health education in kindergarten, visiting the backyard garden the families had started and also doing healthy cooking demonstration in the communities.

It was inspiring to see the work of the community health workers and health educators in the village with their people and the impact they are making. During non-working hours the Health Promotion Officer, Mosese, took us on a tour of Viseisei village talking about their norms, beliefs and their custom. He also spoke to us regarding where and how a medical officer fits in and our role in any given community.



Digging trainee-intern garden plot in VSHC garden

After work we had duties and responsibilities in helping to clean the center and then straight to the volleyball court to play volleyball. We also started our own trainee-intern garden plot hoping in the process to lose a few pounds. We hope the Trainee interns after us will contribute to this garden.

Walking home after work and taking in the beautiful breeze and being captivated by the sea was just breathtaking. Being involved in their activities the days went by so quickly that before long we were in our last day of our attachment. From the beginning we were told that we would be presenting to the staff on preventive health and Healthy Island Settings; at first we thought it would be easy but to our surprise we did not know where to start. However as the days went by reevaluating what we had done in the past days and listening to the different experiences of both the staff and the people we visited we saw public health come to life. This was due to the fact we were given the opportunity to experience first-hand with health educators, community health workers and the people.

Furthermore we had the guiding hands of our supervisors who in various sessions imparted wisdom from their experiences in the health system; this had made us relook at the definition of health and primary healthcare with wellness in mind and to better understand it. The two weeks we have spent at VSHC has enriched our lives personally and professionally. We met as strangers but have become a family. We have come to not only appreciate the works of the nurses, health educators and community health workers but have come to respect them as a people.



Fane Rabici (front left) & Faurina Panapasa (front right) with VSHC staff

We are forever grateful and humbled for this given opportunity and hope to be an example in the roles and responsibilities we play in future.

By Fane Rabici and Faurina Panapasa