



# Meridian

Newsletter of the Australian Chinese Medical Association of Victoria  
澳洲維省中華醫學會

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## ACMAV Visits East Timor

Because of the close proximity and historical ties to Australia, most of us know about the situation in East Timor, in particular the medical and the humanitarian needs of this youngest and tiniest democracy in the world. Some of us also have close contact with Timorese, either as friends or patients.

Through Dr Theong Low who has been a friend and helper to many Timorese, we were invited by Dr Nelson Martin, the Timorese Minister of Health to assist his country in its development of medical education, training and services. The opportunity finally came on the Melbourne Cup long weekend for Theong and I to undertake a fact-finding trip to East Timor from November 1 to 5.

We arrived in Dili on Sunday November 2 after a one hour flight from Darwin where we transited overnight. Dili is a small town ravaged by conflict and poverty. Rubble is strewn along dusty roads and guarded by burnt out buildings which are simply left unattended.

A driver from the Ministry of Health picked us up from the airport to go to our Hotel. We then went to Bairo Pite Clinic to join Dr Dan Murphy on his morning ward round. Fascinating third world medicine: tuberculosis, malaria, tropical infections, advanced cancer, rheumatic heart diseases affecting the very young, old and weak. The care was provided with basic medicines, minimal technology and lots of compassion. It was an eye-opening experience.

Our next stop was to visit the main hospital in Dili, called Hospital Nacional Guido Valadares which has up to 250 beds. We were briefed by the Director of Hospitals, Dr Anna Magno and her colleague Dr Odete Riegas, on the organisation, administration and staffing of the hospital. Currently,

the medical staff consists of local Timorese doctors trained in Indonesia, two general surgeons and an anaesthetist from Australia, physicians and surgeons from Cuba and China. As expected, communication becomes a challenging problem and

deep in West Timor, an hour's flight from Dili. The local population is served by a newly built District Hospital staffed by Cuban doctors. Because of its remoteness, only basic medical and surgical care can be provided at this facility due to the lack of specialist staff and medical equipment.

Apart from seeing the hospitals we also had the opportunity of attending a dinner function for the newly-formed Timorese Doctors' Association hosted by Dr Nelson Martin. We were able to talk to some of the doctors and found some of the problems facing them.

Out of this fact-finding trip, we would like to make the following recommendations to the ACMAV executive committee and

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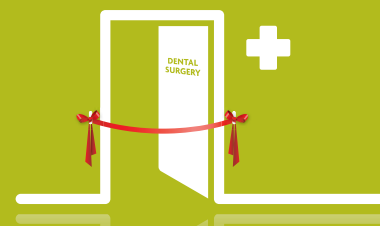


Timorese Youthful Exuberance

affects optimal patient care. Again, more fascinating cases — a man with haematemesis and melaena and a haemoglobin of 4. Endoscopy is not available to diagnose or to intervene. There is only limited chemical pathology to check the haemoglobin or electrolytes. Radiology or ultrasound is very basic and a CT scanner is not available. It is indeed a very challenging environment to work in.

We had the opportunity of flying to Ocussie, which is a remote enclave situated

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This edition of Meridian, the first of the year, gives me the opportunity to wish all members and their families the very best of good health and happiness in this Year of the Ox. Chinese New Year is of course a time of celebration and a time of reflection and renewal.

2008 ended on a sad note for the ACMAV, with the passing of Dr Tom Tsiang, our association's Founding President. Tributes to Tom have been written elsewhere, including in our upcoming Qj magazine, and members will be informed of plans to commemorate his contribution to the ACMAV. Tom was a dear friend and colleague to many ACMAV members. He will be fondly remembered and

sadly missed.

Since the last newsletter, members have had the opportunity to be involved in a range of ACMAV activities. The final seminar of the year, held on 26th November at the Shark Fin House Restaurant, was an entertaining and practical talk given by Associate Professor Denis Spelman on travel medicine. One suspects that members were paying particular attention as they related much of the advice to their own summer holiday travel plans! The Committee thanks GlaxoSmithKline for supporting this event.

Two other events took members on a faster and more thrilling ride: the James Bond

## Cambodian Mission Report

In October 2008, eight ACMAV members undertook a medical mission to Cambodia. We partnered with Community Enabling Healthcare, a Phnom Penh-based NGO whose primary mission is to establish a network of healthcare workers in rural Cambodia. The trip was organized by Citylife Church Hobsons Bay, with generous financial support from the ACMAV Foundation.

Over a two week period, we helped facilitate a training seminar for 30 rural healthcare workers and subsequently ran primary care clinics in four remote villages. The final days of the mission were spent working with students from Phnom Penh at a youth camp.

Cambodia remains a very poor nation, with 75% of its citizens surviving on less than US\$2 per day. Thus as

expected, many of the conditions we encountered stemmed from profound poverty, poor hygiene and malnutrition. Infectious diseases including tuberculosis were common, as were chronic musculoskeletal ailments due to excessive manual workloads. Long village clinics were often an exercise in endurance, treating patients in rural locations devoid of electricity or running water, many hours by dirt road from the nearest hospital. We had to hastily relocate our first clinic when a sudden afternoon monsoonal downpour transformed our consultation area into a muddy pond and we found ourselves ankle deep in mud!



Hordes of thirsty mosquitoes and farm animals milling around us during consultations also added to the eye-opening experience.

The need for primary health care is huge in Cambodia and meeting this demand is a mammoth task which the Cambodian government will take decades to overcome. The loss of millions of lives under the tyranny of the Khmer Rouge still cripples the kingdom today and continues to leave a void of highly skilled manpower. Until the day this void is filled, the job will rest heavily upon the shoulders of volunteers, foreign aid workers and various NGOs.

It was a privilege for us to partner with incredibly dedicated local workers, and we were struck by the remarkable resilience and humility of the Cambodian people who continue to rebuild their society despite sparse resources and huge challenges. The team would like to acknowledge the generous support by the ACMAV Foundation towards the mission.

*Peter Cheng and Jason Oh*

## President's Message

“Quantum of Solace” movie night, and the Porsche Driving Day. These proved to be very popular and were by all accounts a lot of fun, and Michelle Goh and Nicole Yap (respectively) are to be thanked for organising these activities.

ACMAV members were invited to the Annual Charity Ball of the Lions Club of Melbourne Chinese. This was held on 16th November, and proceeds went towards the building of the On Luck Chinese Nursing Home. Those who attended were able to make contact with our friends in the Lions Club, and there was a shared enthusiasm for our two groups to remain in close contact. Previously the Melbourne Chinese Club has been generous in their support of the ACMAV's projects to bring children from Vietnam for surgery.

Our 2009 activities have already begun, with the traditional Chinese New Year Yum Cha, held on 7th February at Taipan Restau-

rant. Despite the extreme heat there was a large turnout, and it was as always a pleasure to meet with members and their families in a relaxed and friendly environment.

The year ahead will be a busy one for the ACMAV Committee as it prepares to offer its members great value in terms of the quality of its educational program, and the diversity of its social events. As well as our own events, I would like to encourage ACMAV members to attend the combined ACMA(WA) & ACCMA conference in Perth this year, in support of the national body and our interstate colleagues. Throughout the year, the ACMAV's community activities will also continue, and a number of new projects will be undertaken.

The Chinese believe that like the Ox, the coming year will be marked as a period of prosperity brought about by hard work and steady progress. Let the hard work begin!

*Adrian Mar*

### *From Page 1*

general membership for consideration:

1. To foster a close relationship with Timorese doctors through their newly formed Association by inviting them to our seminars and annual conference meeting
2. To provide specialist opinion for difficult cases through email or a discussion forum
3. To provide a visiting team for specific projects or needs as requested.
4. To promote Timor Leste as a country in need of medical aid

*Andrew Bui and Theong Low*



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Townhouse for lease (free first week's rent). 3 bedroom / 3 bathroom / 2 car (secure underground garage). \$640pw. Kooyong Rd, Caulfield South. Details on realestate.com.au or domain.com.au. We're the tenants breaking the lease due to family reasons so we're willing to pay your rent for a week if you can move in by the end of March 2009. Please call Christina 0433 030 228.

VR GP Locum required. QV Medical Centre located in CBD requires a locum from the 11th of May till the 29th of May 2009. Excellent terms. Enquiries please call Dr. James Khong. W: 9662 2256 H: 9654 1232 M: 0437677007.

Dr Steven Ng has recently commenced as a consultant neurologist at the Northern Hospital. He also consults privately at Bellbird Private (T: 98452330), Ringwood Private (T: 88044050), Lilydale Private (T: 97354288) and Bundoora Specialist Health Care (T: 94708300). He is fluent in Mandarin and Cantonese. Interests include Dementia, Stroke, Movement Disorders, Headache and Neuropathy

## African Odyssey

In November 2008, Dr Hui-li Wong and I embarked on a 10,000km journey to East Africa. We spent a week in St Nyenga Hospital, Jinja, Uganda and a week in the Yombo Community Clinic in Dar es Salam, Tanzania where we saw the fruits of ACMAV's labour.

Donated beds and medical equipment are being utilised. Yet there is more to be done. We saw many people with malaria and some with HIV. Despite the sparsity of resources they had available, the people of East Africa are resilient and resourceful. There is a strong sense of community, with outreach HIV programs.

Limited laboratory equipment and ongoing needs for medication limits the care provided by local health staff. Often medication, especially anti-malarials, are selected

because of financial constraints rather than best evidence. Preventative medicine is still in its infancy.

Limited infection control measures were seen, however it was pleasing to see the increasing use of mosquito netting. As clinicians working in a developed country, we are accustomed to having at our disposal bedside clinical tools and, in many cases, a 24-hour radiology and pathology service.

Education, provision of bedside tools such as otoscopes, financial advice and visiting specialists may assist the long-term goals of enabling local health staff to stand on their own two feet in entering the developed world.

*Hui-li Wong and Albert Leung*

## Porsche Drive

They say that in motorsport, there is no such thing as going too fast. Either you are going fast, or you are going faster. At the risk of sounding like a Top Gear presenter, I have to say that is complete bollocks. One drive in a Porsche with your heart pushed out of the exhaust pipe, and you know the meaning of too fast. The problem is, that sensation of being yanked inside-out lasts for all of about 4.7 seconds (which how long it takes for a 911 Carrera to go from 0-100km/h) and then you just have the feeling that you could go that little bit faster.

With great thanks to the organisational skills of Nicole Yap, Thomas Heberling of Porsche Centre Melbourne offered a test-drive day to ACMAV members. Notwithstanding the last-minute challenges of accommodating unexpected arrivals, we settled down to a well-organised touring day, running almost as smoothly as



*Presidential speech at the CNY Yum Cha*

a newly-serviced Boxter engine.

The safety briefing was designed primarily to protect us from getting lost, or getting speeding tickets, and the leisurely drive through winding countryside allowed us all to exercise our calf flexors, and take turns overtaking each other.



*Drive Day Members with the Carrera GT2*

After a very pleasurable drive, we arrived at the famous Lakehouse in Daylesford for an excellent meal. If only I had taken Pierre's advice and eaten a light lunch, I am sure I could have made better time on the way back – but that would have meant less time in these mobile miracles of modern engineering, and it really would have been too fast.



*The Convoy takes a breather*

*Jason Chuen*



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