

## Paediatric Cardiac Team visits Vanuatu

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A visiting specialist team from NZ arrived in Vanuatu last Sunday to conduct paediatric cardiac clinics for a week.

The team comprises of Dr. John Stirling, a paediatric cardiologist from Starship Hospital, Auckland, a nurse specialist Heather Spinnetto, Moira McGivern and Leigh Lamont who is an echo cardiographer.

The team spent 2 days in Santo and is now in Port Vila.

The local team consisting of Dr. Wilma Kasso in Santo, Paediatric Cardiac Nurses Blaise Batsary and Joanne Thain, and Dr. Walesi Natuman in Port Vila had all been working very hard to organize cardiac patients throughout Vanuatu to attend these specialists' clinics.

So far, together they have seen 63 patients and have already identified 11 of which need to be referred for surgery in NZ. The common cardiac problems seen here in Vanuatu are Congenital Heart Disease (CHD) and Rheumatic Heart Disease (RHD).

Dr. John Stirling who has a Fellowship in Paediatric Cardiology from Australia is a very kind man and cares greatly for children. He stated, "Coming from NZ, it has been very sobering to see the inequality of healthcare throughout the Pacific and I am very grateful for organizations such as Health Specialists Limited (HSL) and ROMAC that are aware of these inequities and put a lot of effort and money into seeing that these visits are organized and from these visits children with serious cardiac conditions are identified and referred for Surgery in NZ."

He added: "I am stunned at how fast everybody has got back on their feet (after cyclone Pam) and getting the work done here in the hospital".

Heather Spinnetto, who is very passionate about her job as a paediatric nurse also organized some teaching sessions for the nurses and doctors at both NPH and VCH.

Moira McGivern is the overseas patient coordinator at Starship Hospital in Auckland. She is also a member of ROMAC NZ. When asked about her experience on this trip, she became



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The team: (l-r) Heather Spinnito, Moira McGivern, Dr. John Stirling and Leigh Lamont

teary eyed, and stated “it has filled a gap for me, I have never been to Vanuatu, and seeing some of the patients that we (ROMAC NZ) have sponsored for cardiac surgery, all recovered and happy in their home country gives me a great sense of satisfaction with the work that we (ROMAC NZ) do for these children”.

Parents and families waiting in line to be seen commented on how grateful they were for their children to be seen by the visiting team. Acting Head of Paediatric Department, Dr. Walesi also echoed them saying, “We are truly grateful for these specialists’ clinics as it means our cardiac patients are able to get screened and when identified, referred for surgical treatment for their conditions as we are unable to do that here. We also love seeing the kids when they return from their surgeries, recovered and doing so well”.

The Ministry of Health wishes to thank HSL in funding the annual paediatric cardiac visits and also alongside ROMAC NZ in sponsoring our cardiac patients and their families for surgery in New Zealand. This is the team’s 7th visit to Vanuatu since 2010 and leaves for NZ on Saturday.

To find out more information about Congenital Heart Disease or Rheumatic Heart Disease, do not hesitate to go down to Children’s Ward at Vila Central Hospital .