

## The challenges and rewards of life as a librarian in Papua New Guinea

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### Abstract

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is a developing country with many health problems. One of the most pressing of these issues is the shortage of trained health professionals. Divine Word University, a private institution located in Madang, has recently commenced a new Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) degree. Attracting qualified staff is one of the challenges facing the Faculty of Medicine.

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Papua New Guinea is a country with massive health problems. According to a 2015 World Health Organisation (WHO) brief, life expectancy for men in 2015 was 60.6 for men and 65.4 for women. Neonatal mortality is 24.5 per 1000 births, maternal mortality is 215 per 100,000 live births, and only 43% of births are attended by skilled health personnel. Pneumonia, tuberculosis, malaria, and diarrhoeal diseases are the leading causes of mortality,<sup>1</sup> but the shift to a Western lifestyle is leading to increasing rates of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. The twin tyrannies of distance and poverty mean that, especially in the rural areas, people are not able to get to a health clinic. The ubiquity of bush knives and the high rates of domestic violence mean that many minor disputes quickly escalate into confrontation and injury. Lack of medical personnel is a perennial problem. Physician density (per 1000 population) in 2010 was 0.058. By contrast, in Australia the rate in 2013 was 4.984<sup>2</sup>.

### Divine Word University

In response to the need for more doctors, Divine Word University (DWU) established a new medical course in Madang, with a first intake of 26 students in 2016. These students all had a prior qualification in science, and this year they will enter their third year of a five year program. The university is a very new institution, established by priests from the Societas Verbi Divini (SVD), and in particular by a visionary Polish priest, Father Jan Czuba. Originally a Catholic High School, then subsequently an Institute, under the leadership of Father Jan it quickly became one of the best universities in PNG.

I worked for many years as a medical librarian for the Bendigo Hospital, later renamed Bendigo Health. In 2009, I did some volunteer work for Australian Business Volunteers, at Number 9 hospital in Honiara in the Solomons, and then at the George Knight Library at the Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji. While working in Fiji, I was offered the position of Chief Librarian at DWU and have been here ever since. I am really pleased to be working with medical students again. DWU is very fortunate in having a new library built by AusAid in 2007. It is a great building to work in, with lots of natural light and high ceilings that gives an uplifting impression of space.



### **Access to medical literature**

We have comprehensive access to medical literature through Hinari, which is a WHO initiative that provides developing countries with free or low cost access to academic and professional peer-reviewed content online. Hinari gives access to approximately 13,000 journals, and up to 56,000 e-books. British Medical Journal, New England Journal of Medicine, the Lancet, you name it – we can read it! It is less comprehensive when it comes to nursing journals. Our internet connectivity is reasonably fast, but it gets a bit slow when all the students are here.

We have access to the British National Formulary, Cochrane Library, Essential Evidence Plus, Clinical Key, Oxford Textbook of Medicine, all the Oxford Textbooks, Desk References and Handbooks, and my personal favorites, Grove Music Online and the Oxford English Dictionary. Access to a further range of books and journals is provided through Research4Life resources, Access to Global Online Research in Agriculture (AGORA), Access to Research for Development and Innovation (ARDI), and Online Access to Research in the Environment (OARE).

PubMed is used for database searching, with the bonus feature that it links back to the full-text if it is one of the 13,000 journals that we have subscription access to. We also have access to the EBSCO version of CINAHL. We have a budget for textbooks, but a very poor exchange rate and high costs of transport mean that the money does not go very far.

## **Living in PNG**

Life in Madang is very pleasant. It is a small town on the north coast, where the weather is quite hot and humid, but is compensated by access to the sea for big game fishing, swimming, diving, and snorkeling. For the bushwalkers, there is the trek to Mt. Wilhelm (4,509 metres), the Tupira Surf Club, unique bird-watching opportunities, and limestone caves to explore. For the sports-minded, the Country Club has golf, tennis, squash, and bowls. Cultural experiences include yearly DWU days where the students dress in their traditional costumes and show off their finery. This is a mini-version of the big sing-sings held in Goroka and Mt. Hagen, but with more provinces represented.

Security can be an issue. This mainly consists of petty crime in Madang, compared to what happens in the bigger cities of Lae and Port Moresby. The students and staff of DWU live in a gated community, so we do not have much to worry about. DWU is surrounded by squatter settlements, where you see real poverty. This certainly makes one appreciate one's luck to live in Australia.





### German language material

I am currently working on our collection of German language books. The German New Guinea Company colonised this part of PNG. Subsequently, the German government took over running the colony until it was invaded by Australian troops in 1914. Most of the missionaries were from Germany, so there is extensive literature on PNG written in German. We hold over 500 titles in our collection, along with an extensive archive, and we cannot read it! The deputy German counsel in Canberra helped us to obtain a grant from the German government to translate some books, which we will do this year, but it is a very expensive exercise, so I am trying to think of other ways to get translations done.



### **Urgent need for medical teachers**

The biggest problem the MBBS course has is difficulty in finding teachers. We cannot afford to pay the sort of salaries needed to attract doctors to come and work over here. So if you are talking to your library clientele, please ask if they would like to have a bit of an adventure for six months or a year, and come to DWU. You can contact me at dlloyd at dwu.ac.pg. It is a very rewarding experience to work here.

### **References**

1. WHO. (2016) Country cooperation strategy at a glance: Papua New Guinea. Geneva: Who. Retrieved from <http://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/136819>
2. WHO (2016) Global Health Observatory data repository. Retrieved from <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.A1444>.