

Information for elective students at Gizo Hospital

(last updated by Chris and Jan in October 2005)

This was written by medical students on placements at Gizo Hospital. When you have finished your placement, please feel free to make adjustments and update this information yourselves when you are in Gizo, so that future students can also benefit.

BACKGROUND

Firstly: the Western Province of the Solomon Islands is totally safe! There have never been any incidents in the Western Province involving any expatriates, and Gizo is particularly safe and quiet. Students and visiting doctors have lived and worked there over the last five years and enjoyed their time immensely, and at no time anyone felt unsafe. In addition, the presence of the RAMSI PPF (Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands Participating Police Force) here guarantees for safety in this region.

The hospital is situated in Gizo, the capital of the Western Province. It has approx. 60 beds, and takes referrals from all over the province. This makes it cater for approx. 70,000 people. It is the second largest hospital in the Solomon Islands. It also caters for referrals from Choiseul Province which is another island with a population of about 28,000 people.

ON ARRIVAL

The airstrip is on Nusatupe, a small island opposite Gizo, so you will need to get a boat over to Gizo. This is free if you are staying at the Gizo Hotel, otherwise it costs SBD 20. Often



Nusatupe Island with airstrip
Photo: J. Brachlow, 2005

Danny from *Dive Gizo* will meet students at the airport, show them around town, and take them to the guesthouse of their choice. They do this as a gesture of goodwill, since the hospital has no time to do it, but of course they hope you will consider diving with them sometime during your stay (and it's worth it!!). Danny is also president of the local Rotary Society which is involved in sponsoring medical students and doing community activities such as raising money for the hospital etc. They meet every Thursday at 5 pm in *PT109* and you are very welcome....it's more of a social event! Furthermore, Danny won the local election in June 2005 and is now Mayor of Gizo!

Report to the doctors' office at 8:30 am on your first day. The doctors are often a little late, as this is the Solomons (Solomon time!). Dress is casual, sandals are okay, women are expected to have legs and shoulders covered; skimpy tops and short skirts are not culturally acceptable in the Solomons, so please be sensitive to this (see later under clothes).

THE HOSPITAL

There are currently five local doctors (but most of the time there are only three), and there is usually one registrar on rotation from St. Vincent Hospital in Sydney, and up to six medical

students. All doctors are “multitasking”, although some tend to do e.g. more surgery or paediatrics if that happens to be their speciality (Dr Becher is the local Gynaecologist for the hospital). Students have a choice of working on the female and maternity wards or the male and paediatric wards, and are expected to help see outpatients on a daily basis. Outpatients is a good opportunity to practise your clinical and management skills, and to pick up for admission and follow-up yourself.

The hospital deals with a broad range of tropical maladies as well as the medical problems more common in Western countries. Malaria is rife and if you ask patients their past medical histories, many will assume you mean apart from TB, Malaria and hepatitis! Skin and subcutaneous infections are very common, and there will be opportunity to drain abscesses. There is some TB, and rarely leprosy. Other infectious diseases (especially respiratory) make up most of the other presentations. The population is relatively young. Whilst diabetes and hypertension are also common, there are few “gomers¹”. Fractures are manipulated here, though those requiring fixation may be sent to Honiara. Surgery done here includes appendectomies, tubal ligations, vasectomies, minilaparotomies for ruptured ectopics, caesarean sections, amputations, and excisions of lumps and bumps. There are occasional visits from surgeons when more major cases are performed. There are also visits from specialist doctors from overseas.

About three babies are delivered each day (especially at night). The great majority are delivered vaginally and without any pain relief. Students are very welcome and encouraged to get involved as there are no ‘turf wars’ here. Most labours proceed very quickly, so you can get your deliveries up very easily. You can learn to cut and repair episiotomies if you wish.

The hospital has X-Ray and ultrasound facilities, and laboratories to do basic blood tests (LFT’s, Creatinine, Hb etc.). There is no histopathology service.

Complex patients or those requiring orthopaedic or general surgery are retrieved to Honiara either by plane if urgent, or on the *Temotu* boat which takes about 24 hours to reach Honiara. We have been sending almost one patient a week to Honiara with serious illness (unstable fractures, endocarditis etc.).

Gizo Urban Nursing Service (GUNS) also operates from the hospital, and there are many chances to go and help them during their visits to the neighbouring islands. Three to four times a year there are also bigger tours (doctors with nurses) to other provinces, which are a must if you have the chance to go.

PLACES TO STAY

The Hospital cannot supply accommodation or food for students. It is a good idea to buy the ‘Lonely Planet’ guide, although the new edition (May 2005) is very poor and the old edition is a bit out of date but still much better than the new one.

Places where students have stayed before are:

- *Phoebe’s Resthouse* (Tel 60336) (SBD 55/night) and *Naqua* (Tel 60012). Both are very comfortable and little to choose between them. Both are within easy walking

¹ An undesirable hospital patient, see <http://www.worldwidewords.org/weirdwords/ww-gom1.htm>

distance of the hospital (about 5 min). Phoebe's comes with highest recommendations from the current students – nice spot, great view.



Phoebe's Resthouse
Photo: J. Brachlow, 2005



View from Phoebe's Resthouse
Photo: J. Brachlow, 2005

- *Rekona Logde* (Tel 60368). Just off the main road, but a bit further from the hospital than Phoebe's and Naqua (SBD 60 to 90)
- *Paradise Lodge* (Tel 60024). Good view nice rooms, but a long way from the hospital and transport is unreliable.
- *Gizo Hotel* (Tel 60199, www.gizohotel.com). Probably the best equipped accommodation but it's way overpriced for students, but we heard from students that they managed to get a student discount. Still, it's a great spot for cold beers after diving and popular for dinners and their custom dancing shows every Wednesday and disco nights every Friday.



View from Paradise Lodge
Photo: J. Brachlow, 2005

On the web site of *Dive Gizo* (www.divegizo.com) you should be able to get a look at some of the lodges. Reserve ahead if you can, by e-mailing Danny or the hospital and asking them to reserve on your behalf.

FOOD

Self catering is the best and cheapest way to feed yourself. The fresh food market runs daily except Sunday. Best days are Monday and Friday. There are plenty of veggies and greens which are fantastic! Different days will have different produce, ranging from local potatoes (sweet potatoes), tapiocas, peppers, beans, tomatoes, lettuces (sometimes), bok choy², mangos, bananas and pineapples. Don't be afraid, they won't cheat on you. Everybody is paying the same price!

² white Chinese cabbage

There is always fresh fish for sale in the afternoons, from local small reef fishes up to massive 20kg yellow fin Tuna for a bargain! There are butchers for red meat eaters. There are different shops which sell rice, cans and various condiments.

Eating out is about 15 to 30 SBD at lunch time and 40 to 80 SBD for dinner. Just try all the restaurants, it is worth it!!!!

There is a bakery making fresh bread (including occasionally the sought-after coconut bread, yummy!)

GENERAL

We can guarantee that you will learn to dive while you are here. If you can get a PADI or NAUI certificate before you arrive, that's even better. There are currently two dive companies in Gizo (*Dive Gizo* and *Solomon Watersports*). There is little to choose between them. If you plan to dive, in theory you should not take Lariam (can give you some balance trouble while you are diving, but two medical students took Lariam for two months and never had problems at all), Doxycycline is the most popular alternative, but beware: it increases your photosensitivity and can lead to severe sunburns.

Bring more money than you think you will need. You will want to visit some of the nearby islands and the Marovo Lagoon. If you are diving as well, the costs soon mount up! The only credit cards that are accepted are Visa and MasterCard. There is a 5% surcharge when paying by credit card. Cash advances from the bank are possible for Visa and MasterCard, supposedly without surcharge, though the bank or card company will charge you up to 10% from the amount you get, which makes it quite expensive. Amex and Cirrus cards are not accepted.

We recommend to bring Travellers Cheques (American or Australian Dollars) with you because we heard of some thieves. You can cash them at the ANZ bank where they charge 15 SBD commission. At the moment (October 2005) the Solomon Dollar (SBD) is about 5:1 to the Australian Dollar.

Electricity supplies are not too bad, apart from frequent power cuts. E-mail and internet are available at the hospital (they prefer if you use the e-mail at Telekom), the Telekom shop, and at the computer shop 'Gizo computing'. At the Telekom office you will pay SBD 0.80/minute.

The power supply is the same as in Australia (240V/50Hz).

EXCURSIONS

A great weekend away is to go to 'Zipolo Habu Resort' on Lola Island in the Vona-Vona Lagoon. It costs a lot in petrol to get there but that can be split amongst however many people are going, and once there is a tropical paradise of fishing, snorkelling, water-skiing and sometimes surfing. Cost is about SBD 175 for a 4-person leaf hut and you can bring food and cook yourself which makes it a lot cheaper.

Other lovely day-trips are to hike the Kolombangara (island just opposite Gizo, pretty hard walk but the view is amazing).

Go and see Munda in the Marovo Lagoon, great for diving and sightseeing for some WWII wrecks. There is also a hospital in Munda (Helena Goldie Hospital) where you can arrange an exchange for a couple of days if you want to work there, they would appreciate it.



The best place to be during the week is *Fatboys*. It's a lovely bar where you can relax and just have a great time. Grant the owner and his wife will make it an unforgettable place. There is a boat leaving every day at 11 am and 2 pm for SBD 30 return inclusive a drink for free.

Fatboys

Photo: J. Brachlow, 2005

CLOTHES

It's hot here – usually between 28 and 32°C and very humid (70-95%). Bring cotton clothes. Remember that clothes don't tend to last long here, due to humidity and washing facilities (hand washing), so you're best off with cheaper stuff. We would recommend going to your local op shop³ and buying some simple clothes which you can wear here and give away as gifts at the end; such gifts are hugely appreciated by locals. There is really no such thing as fashion here, you can wear what you like.

Ladies should remember that shorts are not generally culturally acceptable in the Solomons and so lightweight longish skirts and dresses are advisable. Gizonians are a little more urban and have been exposed to the excess of tourists, so long shorts are okay in the hospital. In the hospital, neat casual dress is fine. Sandals or flip-flops are the most comfortable footwear. Don't even think about white coats and ties!

THINGS TO BRING

Toiletries – you can get most toiletries here, they are kind of expensive and they may not have your favourite brands, but if you are overweight with luggage, they would suffice. Condoms - can't get them here and you just never know. Sunscreen – at least factor 30 and lots of it (especially if you take Doxycycline) as it is difficult to find here. Heaps of mosquito repellent (some places are worse than others, Gizo is fine). Cream for bites and stings, plasters, torch, camera, a watertight bag is useful when canoeing to islands while the sea is rough. Snorkel, mask and fins, fishing gear, playing cards, walkman and speakers. Stethoscope, pen torches, medical books (ask the medical director if they need one). PENS!!

Umbrella to shield you from the sun and to cover you from the near daily tropical storm.

Presents: T-shirts, caps are great presents for doctors and staff here. You might also bring small gifts for the kids. Balloons do wonders! Also it has been said that local woodcarvers will trade you big time for epoxy glues e.g. Araldite (they use it for inlays).

³ charity shop / thrift shop

THINGS IN SHORT SUPPLY

If you can get hold of any of the following, for donation, it would be a real help!

Sterile gloves, Amnihooks, cannulas, obstetric cream, text books, Cephalosporin, theatre caps and masks.

Certain bigger items would be also gratefully accepted if you have access to donors/charitable organisations e.g. a BP cuff, anaesthetic mask and black bag, a doppler foetal heart rate monitor etc. There is a more extensive wish list of things the hospital really needs that we could send if you think you can find a donor.

HONIARA AIRPORT

Indicate that you are a tourist on your entry/immigration card. Generally answer no to all the questions on the arrival card. The tourist visa is free and they will give you as long as you are staying (up to three month), but you will need to show your outward-going air ticket. If you tell them you are a medical student coming to work/study, they may charge you for a student visa. They may see paperwork as well. Mostly you won't have any problems at all.

When you want to fly to Gizo, you have to go to the domestic airport. For this you have to walk about five minutes, so don't take a taxi.

DURATION OF STAY

We recommend coming for a period for at least 6-8 weeks, for it will take that long to get settled in the hospital and do some of the extracurricular activities. Shorter periods are still very rewarding but don't enable you to soak up the culture and understand the people as much.

CONTACT

Contact info@hermannoberli.ch for e-mail address

Fax: (+677) 60048

If you don't get a reply to your emails, keep trying, as the computers go down sometimes.

Doctors (in summer 2005):

Dr. Gregory Jiliny: medical director

Dr. Alan Alepio: Registrar

Dr. Jones: Registrar

Dr. Chris Becher: Registrar (Obstetrics and Gynaecology)

One visiting registrar from St. Vincent's Hospital, Sydney

Sometimes one Honiara resident medical officer on rotation

Pidgin Words and phrases

The nurses are very helpful and willing to translate for you.

ENGLISH

PIDGIN

I/me	mi
you	yu
you (plural)	yu fella
he/him/she/it	hem
we (excluding the person you are talking to)	mi fella
we (inclusive the pers. your are talking to)	yumi fella
they	olketa
have you got	yu garem
diarrhea	bellyrun
pain	pain
pus	nana
diabetes	sugar sick
sick	sicke
lots	staka
little bit	lelabit
to know	savvy
on, under, over in, to	long (shortened to lo)
possessive	blong
eat	kaikai
breastfeed	susu
drink	drink

Verbs – when nouns follow verbs put an “em” sound on the verb
e.g. me kaikai'em fish – I eat fish

When there is a short word in-between like “to” then put “lo” in
e.g. me like for go lo town – I will got to town

PHRASES

You got pain?	pain, hem cassum yu?
Where's the pain?	pain, hem lo where?
When did the pain begin?	pain, what time hem start?
I'd like to listen to your back	me like for listen lo backside blong yu
Are you weeing ⁴ /eating/ breastfeeding/drinking alright?	yu mimi/kaikai/susu/drink alright?
You will stay in hospital for a few days	bye yu stop lo hospital for fella days
I don't know	mi no savvi
How much? (useful at market)	how mus?
What's this one called?	what naem blong hem?
My name is Steven	naem blong mi Steven
I like to talk to Dr. Becher	mi like for talk lo Dr. Becher

⁴ urinating