Voso Trip to Labasa Fiji

Flying over the sugar cane fields of Vanua Levi the team came into land at Labasa airport greeted with 26°C and a very warm welcome from the Labasa Lions Club.

Our team consisted of ophthalmologists Rebecca Stack, Genevieve Oliver, ophthalmic nurse Marie Taylor, optometrists Michael Brown, Ravi Dass, Marika Fiolitakis, Karen Moulton and myself as well as New Zealand Lions members Neil Pugh and Jennie Vowles.

From the airport we went straight to Labasa hospital where the optometry team delivered our supplies, set up testing stations and a glasses dispensary, while the surgical team went up to Labasa surgical suite to unpack supplies and get the lay of the land.

Monday morning we broke into action. Michael, Marika and Karen started refraction and screening stations while Jennie manned the dispensary table dishing out the prescriptions. In the theatres the team adapted to performing small incision cataract surgery in a foreign environment; dealing with white cataracts, a black cataract and an Argentine Flag all on the first day. Ravi, Neil and I went out to Coqeloa health centre taking our services to those who couldn’t travel to Labasa. Each day a pair from our team went to a different village’s medical centre.

After work each day we were treated to dinner by Labasa lions as well as the hospital board and the Labasa Rotary club. During the week Michael also arranged interesting tours through a sugar cane and a plywood factory.

After a busy week we were looking forward to a weekend getaway to Savusavu. We spent the weekend in the markets, looking around the town, exploring the resorts, a snorkelling trip and topped off with an epic Super15 final. A well needed weekend to recover before getting back into it.

The last week went way too quickly and I was staggered to hear that we’d performed 2370 eye screenings and over 2000 glasses were distributed. The surgical team performed 77 procedures including 73 cataract removals and a penetrating eye injury.

Labasa hospital has improved immensely from what I had been told to expect and this is testament to the hard work of the team there led by the local ophthalmologist Dr Uggi.

It was an amazing experience and the VOSO team were humbled by the hospitality of the Labasa Lions. We all worked hard throughout the trip, had interesting interdisciplinary chats and had a great time socially. I am keen to return in the future and would recommend it to all. Anyone keen to volunteer should email visionzsecretary@gmail.com.