

HUMPTY GOES TO EAST TIMOR



DAY 3

“The vast ocean is made up of many individual drops” _ Mother Theresa

It is easy to become overwhelmed by the incredible challenges faced by the East Timorese people when it comes to medical care.

Sydney nurse Paul Hunstead felt that today when the Humpty Dumpty team ventured out to the remote districts of this incredibly beautiful but poverty-stricken nation.

One oxygen tank for an entire hospital.

One single bed to accommodate a family of four suffering from malnutrition.

A motorcycle the only vehicle on standby to transport critically ill patients to Dili.

These are just some of the atrocious conditions Hunstead – the clinic co-ordinator for emergency at Sydney Children’s Hospital - and Humpty Dumpty team witnessed when visiting the Liquica Hospital an hour west of Dili.

But as he watched a stray dog roam the dilapidated hospital ward, the words of his nursing mentor rang in his ears: “However, limited your resources, you can make a difference in the life of an individual child”.

“We can’t make a huge impact when it comes to the big picture, but we can do things that will change the lives of individuals here in Timor,” says Hunstead, who recently returned from a stint working in Kenya with his wife Sarah.

“The basic things are what these people need. I wasn’t shocked by what I saw today but I was surprised by the lack of human resources and basic equipment – it was not even primary health care.

“There was no evidence of basic medical equipment. If a Timorese child was admitted to that hospital you would be saying your prayers.”

One thing became very clear today - you don’t want to get sick when you are living in remote areas of East Timor.

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Anne Finch, chief executive officer of the Alola Foundation which is dedicated to improving the health of women in the community, said rural families suffered daily due to the lack of medical support.

“If you go to a health post it may not be manned, there may not be a doctor, no equipment, no power,” she says.

“Even if they are referred to hospital they may not have enough money to get there.

“The further you go out the tougher it becomes.”

JUST THE FACTS

- Infant mortality rate for Timorese babies v Australian in 1000 births – 83 (T) 5 (Aus)
- Life expectancy for Timorese men v Australians – 56 (T) 79 (Aus)
- Life expectancy for Timorese women v Australian – 57 (T) 82 (Aus)

(Statistics from Timor Ministerio da Saude/Australian Dr Ralph Hanson, The Children’s Hospital Westmead)

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