

VIEWPOINT

SAMOA'S FIRST TEACHING HOSPITAL

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The government of Samoa has the vision to realise the enormous benefits of a new teaching hospital for the citizens of Samoa and for visitors to this beautiful nation. The new teaching hospital will be built at the Motootua National Health Complex so that it is located strategically within the current national hospital environs. It will feature modern medical equipment, diagnostic services and skilled personnel that will augment the services provided by the over-burdened Tupua Tamasese Meaole (TTM) Hospital.

When completed (first phase planned for 2010), the teaching hospital will be a source of pride for the people of Samoa. However, there may be questions about the merit of establishing a teaching hospital in Samoa instead of a regular hospital. In this article, I will put forward my viewpoints in support of a teaching hospital and perhaps readers of the Samoa Medical Journal may want to express alternate views.

What is a teaching hospital? A teaching hospital (sometimes called a university hospital) is affiliated with a medical school and it provides specialised medical care to patients as well as clinical education and training for future and current doctors, nurses and other health professionals. Students training in teaching hospitals are closely

supervised by experienced doctors. Without doubt, hospitals where medical students and young doctors receive basic and specialist training are generally thought of as the most advanced type of hospital.

Is a teaching hospital a part of the national health network? The answer is a definite 'Yes'. In many countries, Acts of Parliament are enacted to establish teaching hospitals. For example, the *University Medical School, Teaching Hospitals, Act 1955* covers the provision of teaching hospitals for the University of Western Australia (1). Teaching Hospitals are usually part of a complete health care system or network and receive grants to ensure delivery of medical services whilst undertaking education and research activities. Some teaching hospitals are in addition able to recover costs and balance their budgets by treating private patients (for example tourists who carry travel health insurance). In

the USA, there are about 1,100 teaching hospitals, both public and private (2). If a hospital has a commitment to teaching and training, it is generally referred to as a teaching hospital. Good teaching hospitals also make major contributions to research and are centres for experimental,

innovative and technically sophisticated service. In the USA, teaching hospitals also serve as a safety net providing treatment to uninsured and underinsured patients (3).

Teaching hospitals are often the referral site for complicated or 'untreatable' medical conditions. As the American Association of Medical College website states, "Hope Happens at America's Teaching Hospitals" (4). Many of the Nobel laureates in medicine are professors who work in or are attached to major teaching hospitals. For example the Royal Perth Hospital (RPH) is Western Australia's premier teaching hospital, providing a full range of emergency services for adults (except obstetrics) and serving as the State referral centre for many super-specialities. Areas of excellence include interventional neuroradiology, cardiac and lung transplant, burns management, bone marrow transplantation, re-



Fig 1. State of the Art: Artist impression, planned first phase, new National Hospital of Motootua

habilitation medicine and trauma services. RPH has hosted many significant breakthroughs in medical research - significantly, the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori*, which was found to cause stomach ulcers, and won the 2005 Nobel Prize for former staff members Dr Robin Warren and Professor Barry Marshall (5).

Teaching hospitals offer and encourage the practice of evidence based medicine, specialised surgeries, modern drugs, and other intensive treatments that general and regional hospitals cannot provide.

They are where medical knowledge continuously evolves and new cures and treatments are found as a result of breakthroughs in medical research.

Teaching hospitals provide a learning environment where teams of doctors and allied health professionals work to ensure patients have the best and latest treatments available for their illness. It is also true that teaching hospitals attract and retain the best medical professionals because they provide clinicians an opportunity to teach, engage in research and establish an academic career path where they can become professors within the medical school. As per the Hippocratic Oath, doctors are required to teach the next generation of doctors. In the modern version of the Hippocratic Oath, doctors swear by the covenant that they will respect the hard-won scientific gains of those physicians in whose steps they walk, and gladly share such knowledge with those who are to follow (6). In many western countries, large private hospitals seek the imprimatur of teaching hospital status but the best teaching hospitals are the large public hospitals.

The new teaching hospital in Samoa will, when fully operational, have not only the best doctors but the best medical and surgical facilities in the South Pacific. Many of the complicated procedures that currently have to be performed overseas at great cost could, in the future, be performed locally. Patients from neighbouring countries will seek advanced medical treatments in Samoa. The planned teaching hospital will also be of major economic benefit by promoting the tourism industry. More tourists will visit Sa-

moa if they know that, should a medical emergency arise, they can access a top medical facility and qualified doctors locally.

Through its partnership with Oceania University of Medicine, the new teaching hospital will attract and retain some of the best doctors in Samoa. It is not unrealistic to expect that some of the best Samoan doctors will choose to stay in the country and some of those who have left will return to Samoa. Oceania University of Medicine, owned by Samoa and the Samoan people, is

prepared to play its role by ensuring that the new teaching hospital becomes a resource to serve the people of Samoa and the South Pacific by offering world-standard health care services right here in Apia.



Fig 2. Planned new Ministry of Health headquarters at Motootua

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