East Asia Vision Program - Timor-Leste Case Study One
Dr Valerio - Trainee Ophthalmologist

Program component: Workforce development
Implementing agency: Royal Australasian College of Surgeons

Dr Valerio is a junior doctor working for the Ministry of Health in Timor-Leste. He completed an undergraduate medical degree, delivered by the Brigada Medica Cubana (Cuban Medical Brigade) at the Timor-Leste National University in the Timorese capital of Dili in 2011. He was initially posted to the sub-district Natarbora in his home district of Manatutu to work as a family medicine doctor back in March 2011. In Timor-Leste, all graduate doctors are required to complete a community health placement in the districts before doing further post graduate training.



Photo 1 - Dr Valerio at the National Eye Centre in Dili, Timor-Leste.

In September 2013, Dr Valerio was placed at the National Eye Centre (NEC), which is on the grounds of Hospital Nacional Guido Valadares in Dili.

Dr Valerio said that in the beginning he found working at the NEC challenging because when he was a medical student, he only studied ophthalmology for a very short time, just four weeks. However, his confidence has increased due to the supportive environment of the NEC, where he received training from the consultants and other doctors.

While there are many cases at the NEC, the most common presentation is older patients with cataracts, according to Dr Valerio. Other common cases include traumatic eye injuries and glaucoma.

Dr Valerio explained that the consultants provide him with readings to do every day, and he

learns clinical skills in the operating theatre and in the diagnostics room. He is also given opportunities to practice how to use the slit lamp, how to do eye ultrasounds, and how to take biometrics.

One of the first things Dr Valerio learnt was how to do diagnose patients, including how to recognise important symptoms. Once he could manage that independently, he then began to learn how to treat and manage eye problems.

Dr Valerio is one of the first Timorese doctors to start the Post Graduate Diploma in Ophthalmology which started in January 2014. The teaching program is being jointly delivered by Dr Manoj Sharma (RACS Ophthalmologist from Nepal) and Timorese ophthalmologist Dr Marcelino Correia at the National Eye Centre in Dili in collaboration with the National University.

Dr Valerio is keen to continue training and specialise as an ophthalmologist, if there is the opportunity to do so after he has finished the Post Graduate Diploma.

“In East Timor, we only have one specialist ophthalmologist, but East Timor also has many, many cases with eye problems. I would like to study ophthalmology; this is my own decision, not an obligation.”

At independence in 1999, Timor-Leste had very few national qualified doctors, and even fewer specialists. There is currently only one qualified Timorese ophthalmologist. Between 2010 and 2017, over 900 Timorese doctors will graduate from undergraduate medical degrees, in Cuba and Timor-Leste. The Timorese Ministry of Health is now working to establish further post graduate training for these doctors across a range of clinical disciplines, including Ophthalmology.