



YWAM expands with new dental van

An Interview with Ken Mulligan, Managing Director, YWAM Medical Ships

In this article, we interview Ken Mulligan, Managing Director of Medical Ships. YWAM has been providing treatment to communities in desperate need of dental care in PNG from its ship for 10 years. In 2019 they acquired a dental van, with a view to expanding their reach in PNG by launching a school dental programme. We spoke to Ken Mulligan about YWAM and the dental services the charity provides. He told us how this van will make a difference to countless locals once it is operational in PNG, and how the Australian dental community can help.

ADP Tell us a bit about yourself.

KM I came from a farming background. Without going into detail, many years ago I was involved in an horrendous accident where a dear

friend of mine was killed. In the aftermath I had a lot of people who cared for me and the experience marked my life - I wanted to make sure I could give back to our community and people in a deliberate way. I became involved with YWAM in 1983 and have been involved ever since.

ADP How did YWAM get involved with providing dental services in Papua New Guinea?

KM In 2010, we went to meet with the PNG Secretary of Health and asked what we could do to help. They only have 1 dentist per 100,000 people in PNG. We wanted to know how we could practically assist the nation of PNG. With dentists scarce, so many people are suffering and don't have the access to care that we take for granted. It isn't uncommon for people to break their teeth out with a rock and a stick to stop their pain. We were able to forge an incred-

ible relationship with their Department of Health and DFAT [The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade] to make it all happen. We have received funding through individuals, churches and the government, plus Henry Schein strongly supports us by helping with consumables. As we've grown, we have been able to secure the use of a ship that has state-of-the-art facilities and has a 130-person capacity (it's a small former cruise ship).

ADP How do you provide dental services in PNG?

KM We operate the ship in PNG for 9-10 months at a time and get 700-1000 volunteers a year from all over the world (that includes ship's crew, doctors, general hands, etc). At any one time, 25% of our team is from PNG.

We use the ship as a "mother ship", with crew and volunteers on board to do

primary health care. We usually have 4-5 dentists on board, who volunteer for 2-week blocks. There are a lot of remote areas that are hard to get to by road or don't have an airstrip, so we also take small boats to remote villages to do mobile dental work. Depending on what education the locals have, we try to upskill and train them to help. It's great when we can upskill PNG people and provide them with equipment so they can continue on after we have left.

We get a lot of people coming in from outlying areas - we once had a man arrive on the ship after paddling in his canoe in pain for 24 hours, just to see the dentist. We brought him onboard and when we examined his mouth, we saw the source of his pain was 7 broken and decayed teeth. The dentist onboard removed the teeth and he was much happier on his trip home!

ADP What dental work have you done since you started?

KM We have treated thousands of people since 2010 - more than 43,000 dental procedures in rural and remote communities in PNG. Dr Daryl Holmes from 1300SMILES works with us and volunteers his time as a

dentist. He once counted himself doing 131 teeth extractions in one day! We still pull a lot of teeth, but things are slowly getting better through education, which we are helping provide. Young people now know how important it is to clean their teeth.

ADP You've just taken on a dental trailer - tell us about it.

KM There is a lot of need for us to help with dental care in Port Moresby, the capital of PNG, but working from the ship just isn't practical for that location. Simon Palmer from Practice Sale Search had been approached to sell a dental trailer and he and Daryl Holmes brought it to my attention as something YWAM could use in PNG. The van is really high tech and has three dental chairs in it. It was located on the Gold Coast and used for school visits. The PNG leaders liked the idea of us using the van as there are 118 schools there that have no dental and very little medical care.

The previous owners were willing to compromise on their asking price for it to go to a good cause like this and Simon and Practice Sale Search were happy to work pro bono to help us secure it.

We acquired the trailer at the end of December 2019. It is currently in Townsville, waiting to be transported across to PNG to expand our operations there. COVID-19 has delayed our plans a little.

ADP How can people help?

KM In order to get the dental trailer operational in Port Moresby, we require \$120,000 for a prime mover to transport the dental trailer to local schools and settlements. A tax-deductible donation can be given toward the vehicle via our website: ywamships.org/donate/medical-ship

We are also always looking for volunteers; it's an incredible opportunity for dentists to get involved. We always need people, from dentists, dental assistants, procurement and technicians. There is so much opportunity for people to help. For more information on volunteering, visit: ywamships.org/medical-ship/volunteer

For more information, contact YWAM Medical Ships - Australia and Papua New Guinea, based in Townsville, by email info@ywamships.org, call (07) 4771-2123 or visit www.ywamships.org.