

Spring Semester Report

June 2022

A lot has changed during the year since I received the Yvonne A M Smith scholarship. I have graduated with a Masters of Public Health from the Harvard School of Public Health. During this time, I am also extremely saddened by the passing of Mrs Yvonne A M Smith. My time at Harvard University has been highly academically reward. I cannot thank Mrs Smith enough. I hope that I along with all other scholarship winners will be able to carry her legacy forward in our future career.

Reflecting back on the spring semester since my last report, I feel very satisfied in obtaining the academic training for which I had come to Harvard. My entire schedule was open to elective courses after completing the required courses in the fall semester. I drilled down into the subject area of health system policy and research and took classes in health system modelling, quantitative and qualitative research methods, and quality assessment. The strength of the Masters of Public Health program at Harvard University is the opportunity to cross-registrar at other Harvard schools. I took full advantage of this and took courses on community organising at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government and medical anthropology at the Graduate School of Arts and Science.

In addition to taught courses, my academic training also encompassed my research fellowship with the Program in Global Surgery and Social Change at Harvard Medical School. In this role, I continued to support Pacific Island Countries in developing national surgical plans. As a part of this, I published an article in the *Lancet Western Pacific*, outlining how surgical systems can be sustainable and climate-resilient, taking into account the challenges of climate change. This article was very well received in the United States as well as in the Pacific region. I was invited to speak at the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons' environmental sustainability seminar. A highlight of my academic training was attending the 75th World Health Assembly in Geneva with my research program. After working together during the pandemic, we were finally able to meet the delegation of Fiji, Nepal, Malaysia, and South Africa in person and continue our support of their surgical system strengthening efforts.

I have always had an interest in research. I hope to work as an academic surgeon in the future and pursue a PhD after I finish my clinical training in general surgery. My time at Harvard has given me clarity on my future research direction. I hope to be a mixed-methods researcher in the field of health policy and system research. Studying other countries' health systems has made me reflect on my own in New Zealand. For example, compared to many Pacific Island Countries, New Zealand does not have a nationalised emergency air transport system. Furthermore, we also have fewer outreach services to remote areas. Through health policy and system research, I hope to analyse the system for surgical care delivery in New Zealand and improve its design to be truly patient and community centred. I hope to empower and equip colleagues in the Pacific region with the skills to analyse and improve their surgical delivery systems and share our mutual learnings in doing so.

What I will miss the most about my time at Harvard is the friendship I have fostered with classmates from around the world. However, as I graduate from Harvard university, I am also reminded that these friendships will be life-long. We have already made plans for reunion, with many classmates interested in visiting New Zealand. My family and husband were finally able to visit me after nine months apart. We travelled together through Colorado, California, Louisiana, New York, Rhode Island, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona. My travels in the US made me realise

many things I took for granted in New Zealand, such as a sense of safety, community, and environmental consciousness.

I was swelled with pride as a New Zealander when our Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern came to visit Harvard during graduation as the commencement speaker. I was the subject of envy of many classmates as the New Zealand faculty and students at Harvard University had a private reception with her and got to speak to her in person. Her speech summarised a lot of what I had felt during my time overseas. Our democracy is fragile. New Zealand is lucky to be one of the few countries that still has a functioning democracy. As a country, we feel like one big community that still cares for and is kind to each other.

Although I will miss the density of ideas at Harvard, I also feel very ready to come home. I look forward to returning to my clinical training in general surgery and to being plugged back into my networks in New Zealand. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to have studied overseas during the COVID-19 pandemic, a time during which international collaboration for global health is redefined. This experience has made me better understand my role as a New Zealander and a global citizen. I am extremely grateful Yvonne A M Smith Charitable Trust enough for making this opportunity possible. With this experience, I have a greater sense of clarity on my future research direction and hope to start research projects on improving equity in surgical care delivery alongside my clinical training. I look forward to building life-long collaboration with colleagues in the Pacific through the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons on our shared endeavour of improving health system equity.



Graduation from the Masters of Public Health



New Zealand students at Harvard with the Prime Minister



Class photo for 'Advanced modelling for health system analysis'



Hiking 'the Narrows' in Zion National Park