

# **Part Two - My Early Days & WPMPA**

Author : Dr Ram Raju

I resigned from the civil service after 7 yrs of working in various centres in Fiji. Upon internship in 1977, I was posted to Lomawai Health Centre in 1978 taking over from Dr Vakacegu who was a retired government doctor.

In 1979 I was lured into Radiology by a friend of mine Dr Satend Nandan (formerly of Tavua) who was a senior Radiology Registrar at CWMH. Satend was diagnosed with brain cancer and didn't have long to live and told me to come over to take up his position and a chance to go overseas soon for further training. He was a good friend of my eldest brother when they studied together at Shri Vivekananda College in Nadi. I was newly married (Dec 1978) and moved to Suva in Jan 1979 renting a flat not far from CWMH.

In 1981 I was awarded a WHO scholarship in Radiology at the Royal Melbourne Hospital for 6 months. It was an intensive training course in General Radiology, rotation in all the disciplines namely Intervention, Renal, GIT, CVS, Spinal, Neurology and the Limbs. Melbourne University was the back drop for all academic sessions in Anatomy, Physiology and Physics (Radiation etc).

There were weekly clinical sessions in Radiology, Surgery and Medicine that I often attended. Ultrasound was just introduced in 1981 which was housed in Radiology Dept and training had just started for Radio-Sonographers. I returned to CWMH armed with a good deal of knowledge and experience and I was awarded a Certificate in General Radiology by the Australian College of Radiologists.

In 1982 I was transferred to Lautoka Hospital Radiology Dept as a senior medical officer where I worked until late 1983 alongside Dr Jagdishwar Raj .

Radiology didn't quite appeal to me as a discipline, much as I tried to accept and progress further. I loved working more as a clinician and every Saturday and sometimes Sundays helped out in the GOPD, both at CWMH and Lautoka Hospital. The Medical officer in charge of GOPD as well as the medical superintendents accepted an extra hand and voluntary services.

And just before my resignation from Lautoka Hospital, I was given an opportunity, upon a special request, to rotate in all the disciplines at Lautoka Hospital that included Paediatrics, Obs/Gyne, Medicine and Surgery. Orthopedics and A&E were not established at that time of my resignation in late 1983.

I wanted to set up my practice in my home town of Sigatoka and to be closer to my parents and other family members in Nasau, Valley Road. It was a grand home coming to a place I loved and craved so much. Our ancestral home was next to Sigatoka River and when I was a young toddler admired the river swell during hurricanes and cyclones. In fact found it exciting even more when the rivers would flood our farmlands and roads meaning no schools for several days !!

In early 1984 I finally set up a practice in Naibale, Korolevu but maintained my Sigatoka Town Practice during the day from 8am to 3pm I would come back to Korolevu by 4pm to hold clinics at Hyatt Regency (now Warwick Fiji Resort) from 4-4.30pm and later at Naviti Resort for 1/2 an hour. I would be free by 5 or 5.30pm to join soccer training with staff from Hyatt and Naviti Resort. There was a ground near Naviti Resort that was maintained by Naviti which still exists today next to the main highway.

I represented Nadroga Soccer team for several years (1984-1986) but at that time ka Sigatoka Soccer Association. I also played for Nadroga in 1978 when I was posted at Lomawai Health Centre. And one of the reasons for me to take up Radiology in those early days at CWMH and Lautoka Hospital was this very reason, to play soccer and hockey. There were no after hrs call !!

I represented FSM for 4 years in both soccer and hockey as a medical student. Saturdays Hockey at Albert Park in those days and Soccer on Sundays. FSM was in the senior division of Suva Soccer Association and a well respected team in Suva Hockey Association.

FSM provided buses to take players from Tamavua campus and Hoodless House down to Albert Park on both days and brought us back just before evening dinner. It was a wonderful service provided by FSM in those days which existed for donkeys of years.

Coming back to my private practice and in late 1986, I moved to Nadi when Dr Munswamy Naidu was selling his practice together with his house in Sagayam Rd. Leaving for Nadi was a very difficult decision, emotionally, as my parents and other family members didn't want me to leave Sigatoka. Living in Naibale wasn't easy as there was no electricity nor tapped water. I relied on rain water for drinking and cooking and a hilly damn water for washing purposes. A small diesel generator gave some comfort for 3-4 hrs at night.

Despite the drawbacks I enjoyed staying with the community at Naibale and made everlasting friends. Naibale was the backdrop of a true community medicine and from here I started the crusade for the formation of a National Body and subsequently FCGP.

I was into "politics" from a young age. I became active with FSM Student's Association. One of the first issues raised by me was \$2.00 a fortnight allowance paid to us as students that was deemed too little. We agitated and won an increase to \$4.00 per fortnight!!

This gave us more money for beers !!. A carton of beer at that time (long necks only) cost us \$8.00 and if 4 of us got together, a handsome meal used to be ordered at new Peking Restaurant that was most popular restaurant at that time (and few to choose from). New Peking is still there in Victoria Parade, not far from popular nightclubs of that time (and still is)

In 1973 I headed the FSM Food Committee for a year and brought about changes desired by the students. Fish and Chips and other delicacies soon added to the menu.

I went to the Principal Dr Bhupendra Pathik with the request for changes and quite surprisingly he agreed to the list of changes to the menu, saying to me "the brain will function well once the stomach is satisfied and you need to have the brain functioning well to pass exams"

In 1975 I lost the election for Presidency of FSMSA to Latu Sisifa, a Tongan medical student who was together with me in my class. I believe he migrated to Australia as a Gynecologist in later life.

My class was one of the smallest graduating class of 1976, only 7 with 2 sitting supplementary examinations.

The following graduated successfully: Bhagat Ram (deceased), Shama Raj, Kamla Samujh (married and settled in Seattle, USA), Nisha Hanif (somewhere in Sydney), Shamsheer Ali (Surgeon Port Pirie , Australia). Dr Semesa Matanaicake (deceased) and Kumar P Singh (Pathologist, Syd) were the 2 who sat supplementary examinations and graduated later.

Dr Guy Hawley Senior was the Principal of FSM when I enrolled and about 3 years later, Dr Bupendra Pathik took over the leadership.

I did my internship at Lautoka Hospital including final year medical student attachment for 3 months. I loved Lautoka as I studied at Natabua High School for 4 yrs (stayed in the hostel) and Lautoka became my favorite soccer team. And I returned to Lautoka Hospital as a Senior Radiology Registrar in 1982 and worked alongside Dr Jagdishwar Raj and Om Prakash Trehon who was about to return to India.

As a member of FMA, I was quite active in helping organize seminars etc. There was a bit of political turmoil at FSM when Dr Bhupendra Pathik was being removed as the head to be replaced by an expatriate by the name of Prof Harry Lander from Adelaide Uni.

I was requested by FMA secretary at that time Dr Karam Singh to lobby support from FMA members in the west in the form of a petition calling for his reinstatement as the Principal of FSM. I could see the injustice so had no hesitation in collecting signatures from doctors based in Sigatoka to Rakiraki Hospital. I did this exercise during my off duty hrs but the news got to headquarters for an investigation on my role.

A meeting was called in the conference room with all the consultants and MS Dr Peni Rika presided over the meeting. I was asked to explain which I did quite confidently as I believed Pathik was denied the justice he deserved. Peni Rika concluded the meeting by requesting me to steer away from politics accepting my explanation.

Dr Deo Dutt Sharma was the president of FMA at that time and soon we heard the news about rotten eggs splashed on Harry Lander's head in the FT headlines news !!