



# VILLAGE MISSION PHARMACY

## Kingdom of Tonga

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR PHARMACISTS INTERESTED IN ASSISTING AT VILLAGE MISSION PHARMACY

#### **Brief Description**

The Village Mission Pharmacy is a community pharmacy in the Patco Building, Taufa'ahau Road, Nuku'alofa. It arose out of the work of the Village Mission Clinic, started in 1984 by Mr Manu and Dr Glennis Mafi in Ha'ateiho, and was opened in February 2004 by the Minister of Health Hon. Viliami Tangi. It is a private pharmacy owned by the Village Mission Trust. Both the Clinic and the Pharmacy are run on a not-for-profit basis with all income used to support the work of the clinic and pharmacy. In recognition of the not-for-profit status, Village Mission Trust was incorporated in Tonga in 2003

#### **Vision**

Village Mission Pharmacy aims to provide easy access to affordable and appropriate medicines and health advice for people in Tonga and in keeping with the law in Tonga, in order to improve the health and well-being of the community.

The objectives of the Village Mission Trust are:

- 1) To establish and maintain a Christian witness in Tonga through health ministries, and to make a significant contribution to the health and well-being of the community.
- 2) Whenever possible to demonstrate through these health services that the Christian faith integrates with daily life and experience and can make a difference, especially to those suffering physically, mentally and spiritually and to those who support and surround them.
- 3) To establish or assist with the establishment of medical facilities, whether primary medical care clinics, pharmacies, community clinics or hospitals or any other related health service in Tonga, and to establish these on a foundation of Christian principles.
- 4) To work cooperatively with other health services and professionals in Tonga.
- 5) To encourage and be active in research in health related areas.
- 6) To be involved in ongoing education of health professionals in Tonga, whether local people or visiting health professionals and students

#### **Location and Facilities**

The Pharmacy is located in the Patco building which is on the main road in Nuku'alofa. It has a parking area then a path through a small garden leading to the building. Inside is a main shop area and a dispensary, plus a staff room shared by Village Mission Clinic which has worked alongside the pharmacy since May 2010. The facility is simple but clean and bright. It is fully computerised and uses the Toniq dispensary and retail programmes.

## **Services and Stock**

In line with its Vision the pharmacy tries to provide a wide range of good quality and lower cost prescription and self-selected medicines and other pharmacy products such as skin care, baby products and wound care, but currently few cosmetics or gift items. Prescription medicines cover a wider range of community medicines than is available through the Vaiola Hospital pharmacy, and special requirements for individuals are met if at all possible.

Ordering and maintaining stock can be a challenge because of the time required to have orders processed, shipped and cleared through Customs. Donated supplies are often received and supplement bought medicines, enabling medicines to be provided for people who cannot afford bought medicines. Donated items cannot be sold but a handling fee is usually charged.

No subsidies are available from the Tongan Government; all income is from sale of goods, with a small amount of monetary donations used mainly for repair or purchase of equipment, and shipping.

Village Mission Pharmacy aims to maintain a high professional standard in all its services, to demonstrate responsible and honest use of medicines and health advice, and to comply with relevant law.

## **Prescription Services**

The Village Mission Pharmacy complies with the Therapeutic Goods Act 2001 and Pharmacy Act 2001. This legislation is important to control the importing, regulating, prescribing and dispensing of medicines in the Kingdom, particularly to prevent untrained people selling or distributing potentially harmful medicines, and to require scheduled medicines to be only available on prescription of a registered doctor and dispensed under the supervision of a registered pharmacist.

## **Health Promotion**

The Pharmacy also seeks to promote good health advice and there is huge scope for this to be developed. Chronic illnesses are big issues in Tonga and the Pharmacy and Clinic are in a good position to assist the Ministry of Health in primary and secondary prevention. Health promotion in areas such as oral health, breastfeeding, smoking cessation, nutrition and exercise are an important part of the pharmacy's role.

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## **Relation to Tongan Government Departments**

The Village Mission Pharmacy has always had a good relationship with Tongan government departments that relate to the service we offer.

### *Ministry of Commerce, Tourism and Labour*

The Pharmacy has been active since February 2004 and has a business licence in the name of PMMT?

### *Ministry of Health*

The Pharmacy is well known to the Ministry of Health along with the closely associated Village Mission Clinic and its founders Mr Manu Mafi and Dr Glennis Mafi. The establishment of the pharmacy was supported by the Minister of Health, the Hon. Viliami Tangi, who opened the pharmacy in February 2004. The Pharmacy supports the Ministry of Health in its endeavour to better control the pharmacy industry, and works in accordance with the Pharmacy Act 6 (2001) and Therapeutic Goods Act 8 (2001).

### *Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade*

The Pharmacy has always complied with requirements of the immigration department for our visiting staff.

### *Ministry of Revenue and Customs*

The Pharmacy complies with requirements of Revenue Services and Customs.

## **Relation to General Public and Village Mission Clinic**

The Village Mission Pharmacy is popular with local residents and non-Tongans living in Tonga and also provides an excellent service for visitors to the Kingdom.

The Mission Statement of the Village Mission Clinic is:

*“To provide high quality primary health care for the people of Tonga at as a low a cost as possible, and in a Christian setting i.e. to be aware of spiritual needs; to treat the whole person; and to do that from a Christian point of view where appropriate, though always respecting the person’s own philosophy of life.”*

It also aims to conduct all its affairs with a high ethical standard in keeping with its Christian stance. It seeks to work cooperatively with other doctors and clinics in the Kingdom, especially those of the Ministry of Health. Over the years the Village Mission Clinic has earned a reputation as a clinic where people are treated fairly regardless of social status, and where they can obtain a full assessment and explanation of their condition, and this reputation carries over into the pharmacy, which since May 2010 has been managing the affairs of the Clinic.

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## **Financial Explanation**

In line with its Vision, the Pharmacy endeavours to provide affordable medicines to the people of Tonga. This is not easy, but it has been assisted in this aim by many generous donations of finance, goods and expertise from its earliest planning and setting up until now. It grew steadily through 2004 to 2007 and then suffered setbacks in 2008 and in 2013. However much work and goodwill has been invested into the pharmacy and it is now functioning well.

## **Pharmacist Position, Conditions & Remuneration**

Accommodation is usually arranged prior to a volunteer's arrival in the Kingdom, the amount is to a specific limit. Staff at VMC/P usually try to get an idea of the volunteer's needs and then find something to suit within budget. The current living allowance is \$400 Tongan Pa'anga per week. This is enough for 2 people to live on simply. The pharmacy pays for registration and visa costs (that are payable in Tonga) and may also be able to pay for a return airfare from Auckland if a pharmacist stays for six months or more. Doctors are employed by the Village Mission Clinic under similar conditions. This work requires the good will and support of health professionals and others associated with it. The attraction of this position is not money but the interest and challenge of working in a different environment.

The Pharmacy's opening hours are 8.30am – 5pm Monday to Friday and 10am – 1.30pm on Saturday. These are long hours but, although there is plenty to do, the pace is slower than at most overseas community pharmacies so short term staff will have plenty of time and energy left for making the most of everything Tonga has to offer.

Health professionals who come to work in Tonga need to prepare for a different working "climate". Services a pharmacist may usually refer patients to, such as general practice, optometry, podiatry and physiotherapy are much more limited than in countries such as New Zealand, Australia and the USA. Standards of other health services and professionals may not meet expectations. Patient presentations, behaviours and responses can be different. We need to be patient, compassionate, good-humoured, and able to make-do and improvise.

Also there are few checks in the health system in Tonga so in order to keep its excellent reputation and for the sake of the patients and clients, the Village Mission Pharmacy & Clinic look for doctors and pharmacists of integrity and honesty who will maintain the kind of standards expected of them in New Zealand or Australia, even though no one is checking up.

The Clinic and Pharmacy also seek staff who will respect traditional Tongan culture, but also encourage lifestyle that is consistent with physical health and with godly, moral standards, and always uphold the sanctity of human life from conception to death.

## **Staffing**

To carry out its mission statement, the Village Mission Pharmacy requires pharmacists who are experienced in community retail pharmacies.

Currently Tongan pharmacists in the Kingdom are employed full time with the Ministry of Health. There are now a few retail pharmacies, usually staffed by expatriate pharmacists. Village Mission Pharmacy has been careful to develop good working relationships and a spirit of cooperation with the other retail pharmacies in order to provide optimal service to its clients, e.g. when VMP cannot provide a specific product, our pharmacist generally will call the other pharmacies to see if they have the product and then provide information to the client on where they might obtain the product.

In view of its charitable nature the pharmacy is not able to pay a salary significantly higher than that currently available from Ministry of Health so it requires pharmacists who are willing to volunteer their time and who see the work of the pharmacy as a charitable mission.

Current staffing of Pharmacy and Clinic:

Qualified Volunteer Pharmacist: Jasmin Dodge (NZ), from March 2012

Pharmacy Assistant: 'Amelia Latu (Tonga), employed January 2014

General Practitioner: Vacant as of February 2016:

Consultant Physician (Fridays): Dr Taniela Palu

Nurse Assistant and Translation: Pele Tonga (Tonga), employed since 2000

## **Registration and Work Permits**

### **Registration**

In order to practice as a pharmacist in Tonga, registration must be granted by the Pharmacy Board of Tonga, Ministry of Health, prior to applying for work permit. Application form requires accompanying documents, including copies of qualifications, certificate of good standing, current practising certificate, birth certificate and character and professional references. The pharmacy board meets only monthly (and sometimes a lot less often than this) so application needs to be lodged as early as possible. The best way to do this is to keep a copy for yourself and e-mail and post the hard copy to the pharmacy staff, who will take it to the Registrar of the Pharmacy Board. The certificate of good standing (or equivalent) needs to go directly to the Pharmacy Board from your registration organisation. Please e-mail Village Mission Pharmacy for the current e-mail and postal address for this.

### **Work Permit/Employment Visa**

A visa is required for people for anyone intending to work (including volunteer) in Tonga. This application needs to be submitted with a registration certificate (above), evidence of professional qualifications, a signed job contract and two recent passport photos. If applying to work for longer than six months, the application requires two written character references, police record/certificate and a health check. It is well worth doing these if there is any chance you may stay for longer than six months. This process is to be completed before you arrive in Tonga, strictly speaking, but as long as it has been submitted for approval you will be able to enter on a provisional

work visa. Often immigration allows the pharmacist into the country and finalises the visa, including stamping the passport, after arrival.

Please keep a copy for yourself and e-mail and post the hard copy to the pharmacy staff to take to immigration. A family can share one form if only the pharmacist will be employed while in Tonga.

### **About Tonga**

Tonga is a small island nation, the only constitutional monarchy in the Pacific, and a great place to live and work especially with a young family. There is enough need to assure you that you are really making a difference in your medical work. Primary medical care, including community pharmacy services, are very limited in Tonga. Admittedly, compared to many more deprived countries Tongans are well off, but compared to NZ and Australia they have a long way to go and the Village Mission Clinic & Pharmacy have made a real impact on extending the services and medicines that would otherwise not be available. Doctors and pharmacists from New Zealand, Australia, the UK, Holland, USA, Philippines, Nigeria and Norway have worked there and all offered their unique contribution.

From the point of view of a family, it is friendly, safe, warm and humid but without real extremes of climate, and no really nasty diseases or snakes. The beaches are close by, it's a simple life-style and it's just a few hours from NZ and Australia. There is a great community of expats and a range of leisure and volunteer opportunities available. Examples of volunteer work include: assisting with at a centre for adults and children with disabilities, remedial reading at the local English language school, children's sporting activities, animal welfare and so on. There are English speaking kindergartens, primary and secondary schools with a variable academic standard, but with a lot else to offer – more specific information available on request.

### **For enquiries**

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**The Joy of the Lord is our Strength!**