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A holiday with a difference

By Helen Anderson

With today’s fast-moving, hard-working lifestyle most people taking holidays usually opt for a paradise to relax, far away from the pressures of everyday life.

Well, not so for Queensland Ambulance Service Intensive Care Paramedic (ICP) and Clinical Support Officer for Brisbane Central, Darrin Burgess.

Darrin, who usually helps out the Australian Kidney Foundation with 4WD events during his annual leave, decided this year to offer his services to train staff from the hospitals and universities of Peradeniya and Kandy in Sri Lanka.

He said as part of the Paramedics Abroad project, in conjunction with the University of Peradeniya, volunteers were accepted to train nurses, doctors and ambulance drivers in pre-hospital care.

“I say ambulance drivers because that’s all they are there. Some of them know a little first-aid but the majority do no patient care whatsoever,” he said.

“They only have an inter-hospital transfer truck – that’s all it is. No triple-zero system – they don’t have anything. So their emergency treatment starts at the door of the hospital.”

Darrin said the largely non-existent approach to pre-hospital care also resulted in a significantly lower recovery rate.

“In the intensive care ward – I saw a bloke who fell from a coconut tree – he had a broken neck and he wasn’t breathing properly. He was folded up in a little taxi and by the time he got there he had a secondary head injury and he’ll probably never wake up again,” Darrin said.

“Just basic care would have helped that person survive. At the end he was still on a ventilator and he has a very bad spinal injury.”

Darrin traveled over with fellow QAS paramedic Eddie Cox from Caboolture and three paramedics from South Australia, Dave Stevenson, Peter Tebbett and Ken Kurtz.

They had to take their own CPR dummies and the SA paramedics donated tabards to the hospital medical staff.

It wasn’t all work though, with the nurses taking the paramedics for a day tour to Colombo to see an elephant orphanage and Ceylon to the tea plantations.

“It was my first time in a third-world country and I would go back in a second. Internationally, Queensland teaching technique and Queensland paramedic skills are really up there.

“The people were so appreciative of our help, just the small things made a difference and that’s what I was able to do.”

The self-funded trip was made possible with assistance from the Bribie Island Local Ambulance Committee and QAS staff member Pamela Greet and Nick Beaton.

Anyone interested in supporting or being involved in the project can contact Darrin on: dburgess@emergency.qld.gov.au.”



Conditions in the emergency department of Kandy Hospital.



Medical camp Maiyanganaya – a waiting game.