



Vital medical supplies from Australia reach remote Papua New Guinea to fight the COVID-19 outbreak

CALOUNDRA, QUEENSLAND - 9 June 2021: The arrival of two 40-foot shipping containers loaded with desperately needed personal protection equipment means hospital staff in the remote Western Highlands region of Papua New Guinea at last have face masks, hand sanitiser, face shields and non-contact thermometers to properly protect themselves from the onslaught of COVID-19.

With the number of cases in Papua New Guinea tripling in March and hundreds of already overstretched health workers falling victim to the virus, largely due to a lack of personal protection equipment, the shipment from Australia was desperately needed. Without it, in a country where the latest WHO figures suggest there is only 1 doctor and 11 nurses for every 20,000 inhabitants, the results would be devastating.

Rick Menzies from Mercy Ships COVID-19 Response Team commented, "When we heard that medical staff in PNG were having to treat patients without adequate personal protection equipment, we felt that we just had to do something about it. These dedicated doctors and nurses should be protected as much as possible while they are working to save others. They should not have to risk their own health, as well as the lives of their family members as they do their job."

Working with Australian corporate partners including Source Buy Sell, Santé Group, and Defries Industries, Mercy Ships was able to fill two 40-foot shipping containers with PPE supplies, shipping them from Melbourne to Lae with the help of Swire Shipping. Then, using trucks generously supplied by local supermarket chain Tininga, the containers made the arduous 470km trip through the mountains to Mt Hagen.

On opening the containers, Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority CEO Jane Holden said, "This is amazing! I want to thank you all so very, very much".

The shipment contained nearly 32,000 litres of hand sanitiser, tens of thousands of gloves and masks, and over a hundred infrared non-contact thermometers, enabling hospital staff to quickly and safely screen, visitors and patients as they enter the hospital.

However, this is only the beginning as Mercy Ships is already talking to other companies and funding agencies, sourcing vital testing equipment and more PPE supplies, not only for the Western Highlands region, but also for additional remote areas of Papua New Guinea desperately in need of support.

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About Mercy Ships

Mercy Ships uses hospital ships to deliver free, world-class health care services, capacity building, and sustainable development to those with little access in the developing world. Founded in 1978 by Don and Deyon Stephens, Mercy Ships has worked in more than 55 developing countries, providing services valued at more than \$1.7 billion and directly benefitting more than 2.8 million people.

Our ships are crewed by volunteers from over 60 nations, with an average of over 1,200 volunteers each year. Professionals including surgeons, dentists, nurses, healthcare trainers, teachers, cooks, mariners, engineers, and agriculturalists donate their time and skills. With 16 national offices and an Africa Bureau, Mercy Ships seeks to transform individuals and serve nations one at a time.

www.mercyships.org.au

Mercy Ships is currently featuring in The Surgery Ship series which premiered on 7TWO on Sunday, May 23rd and continues each week until 12 July.

Watch a two-minute series teaser at <https://youtu.be/lkUDDUBvFY>

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