

UniFiji Watch



Issue No. 7

A publication by the University of Fiji's journalism students

June 2025

Medical school teams up with charity in fight against cancer

By Zalika Ali

The University of Fiji's medical school is working with a leading charity to help fight cancer, the third leading cause of deaths in the country.

The Umanand Prasad School of Medical and Health Sciences has partnered with the Fiji Cancer Society in a programme that will include regular health checks and screening at the university campuses and raising awareness, said acting Dean of the school, Dr Abhijit Gogoi.

He emphasised the need to improve the diagnosis and treatment of the various types of cancer.

"We are looking for more chemotherapy drugs and that's why we accepted the collaboration with Fiji Cancer Society to help our staff and students with the latest technology."

He said that as they trained the students they would be looking for chemotherapy drugs which Fiji patients were missing out on. The plan includes getting the drugs at an affordable price, so patients can be treated in Fiji rather than having to travel abroad.

"Many times we diagnose cancer at hospitals but do not have proper chemotherapy drugs so for that, the patient needs to travel overseas which costs a lot."

The plan of action also includes preventative action. Whether it was breast or cervix cancer it is often related to family or genetic causes but there are some other things that need to be taken care of.

"Health awareness is the main thing for anybody who has a history of breast cancer or cervical cancer in the family."

"I always advise that once you cross 40, go for yearly screenings," Dr Gogoi said.



Dr Abhijit Gogoi emphasised the need for improved diagnosis

If it is in the family DNA, individuals will be prone to it. It is not that we will have cancer by consuming certain foods or drinks. It's the genetic mutation and environmental factors, Dr Gogoi said.

Under the partnership plan, details of which are still being worked out, the university will provide manpower and the Cancer Society will train the students also.

The Cancer Society needs staff and students for their monthly screening camps in villages – and in return we are getting trained staff

and students.

"It's a win-win situation for both of us".

"Fiji had one oncologist five years ago but due to the current situation which is lack of staff and medical facilities, the oncologist had to return to WHO."

"Once we do the basic things, we get all the infrastructure, then we can call the oncologists from WHO."

Any sort of cancer is caused by the rapid multiplication of cells, Dr Gogoi explained.

"Cells don't multiply on their own. There has to be a genetic mutation or defect in the DNA which causes the cells to multiply uncontrollably," he said.

Screening is the only way to get an early diagnosis, and once a patient gets a diagnosis, treatment can begin. But if the cancer has spread to the lymph nodes then the chances of surviving more than five years is low.

"Health awareness is very crucial," Dr Gogoi said. "It's necessary to overcome the stigma of pap smears or getting screened for cancers. That is also a concern to us."

"The aim is to get the people staying at home screened. They are the ones who ignore symptoms such as fatigue not wanting to go to work, unexplained weight loss."

"These symptoms occur due to the immature cells taking up the glucose or energy from the body which determine a healthy body, while the energy is being consumed by the immature cells."

"People staying at home fail to understand their loss of appetite."

The first step in this partnership is to focus on people above 40 and get them screened for

cancer and then getting younger people into the project.

He said there was a higher success rate with breast cancer because it spreads very slowly. If it has spread to the lymph nodes, and they are removed, the chances of survival are very good.

With cervical, lung, and stomach cancers the disease spreads very fast, and by the time a person is diagnosed it is likely it has spread to other parts in the body, he said.

Women are now encouraged to do regularly check for breast cancer in the comfort of their home.

"They can easily check themselves for any lump and then take further health measures," Dr Gogoi said.

Speaking of other cancers such as colon cancer, with which certain foods are sometimes associated, Dr Gogoi cautioned, "As a physician I do not support herbal medicine because they do not have proper dosage and composition to be consumed."

Dr Gogoi said the Government is also very keen on providing help in cancer research, and the medical school was working with the ministry of health on plans for door-to-door screenings for cancer.

"The ministry is working on bringing in a good amount of chemotherapy drugs so those two are the main things," he said.

"We do not have proper diagnosis set-up and the most vital point is that we do not have oncologists."

"So, the plan is to aim to get chemotherapy drugs at an affordable price so that we can treat the patients in Fiji."

First journalists join this year's graduates

Vice-Chancellor Shaista Shameem highlighted the role of the University of Fiji in preparing future leaders as 223 graduates proudly received their awards this year.

Among the new degree graduates were the first from university's journalism and media department.

The Pro-Chancellor Pundit Bhuwan Dutt continued the theme in emphasising the importance of service to the nation.

The graduation ceremony also marked the 20th anniversary of the university started taking students.

By Tanisha Bi

Multiple disciplines were represented among the students graduating in a ceremony that included prayers and celebratory songs in English and Hindi.

Academic excellence was honoured with medals and special awards presented to students who performed exceptionally in their respective fields.

Vice-Chancellor's Award:
Ayesha Kirti Reddy



Continued on Page 2 Happy new graduates wait to receive their awards at the graduation ceremony

● Most outstanding student – Page 2

● Covid – Five years on – Page 3

● The VC's view – Page 3

● Your say – Page 4



Cream of the crop... awards for top students

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School Gold Medal Awards:

School of Science and Technology: Sudarshan Prasad;
School of Business and Economics: Ruqayyah Binth Abdul

Hakim;

School of Humanities and Arts: Ayesha Kirti Reddy;
Umanand Prasad School of Medicine and Health Sciences: Purnima Devi.

Top Discipline Awards:

Accounting & Economics: Ruqayyah Binth Abdul Hakim;
Information Technology: Sudarshan Prasad;
Physics, Mathematics & Graduate Teaching: Ayesha Kirti Reddy;
Medical Health Science: Jane

Tamoi Nawa Tuidraki Veikoso;
Nursing Post Registration: Purnima Devi;
Postgraduate Diploma in Education: Mohammed Juned Hussein;
Master of International Relations & Diplomacy: Cynthia Riya Khan.

The graduates came from six faculties and one centre.

Family and friends of the graduates, along with local and national dignitaries watched as graduates received their awards on April 4 at the Saweni campus of the university.

First journalists graduate from media school

FROM classroom to newsroom, the first cohort of journalism students from the University of Fiji are ready to make their mark on Fiji journalism.

Three of students who started in the Bachelor of Journalism and Media Studies degree programme graduated in this year's graduation ceremony.

The course was first offered in 2022.

Five eager young students – all women, as it turned out – started out on their journalism adventure with JMS101 (Introduction to Journalism Practice).

The country was just coming out of the Covid nightmare, and JMS101 was, like most courses, run online.

Their lecturers “met” them online, and delivered their lectures and course material on Google Meet, sometimes from overseas.

Later some of the classes were face to face.

From the off, the department and individual lecturers placed great emphasis on hands-on experience. From very early on in their first year, the students gained practical experience by tasting life in newspaper and

By UniFiji Reporters

radio newsrooms.

They learned to go out with working journalists, interview people, take pictures and come back to write their stories – and revel in seeing their names in print.

Another milestone for the students was in setting up a newspaper, *UniFiji Watch*, which they planned and produced over that first semester. It was launched with much fanfare by Islands Business editor Samantha Magick in September 2022.

One of the students had to leave midway through the course, but the other four completed their first year and moved on to their second-year studies in 2023.

This year three of those pioneers graduated (one as the most outstanding student – see story at right), and another will complete her studies in the next few months.

They are now considering job offers.

Meanwhile more students have started their journalism studies and are progressing toward careers in the media.



Top student: Seran Devi, one of the first intake of journalism students

Perseverance pays off

“Prioritising and organising yourself are essential to achieving success in life,” says new graduate Deepika Naidu.

The 31-year-old teacher and mother has added a post-graduate Diploma in Education Leadership to her Bachelor of Arts degree, in which she majored in English and economics.

“The flexibility offered by the university, especially through its distance and online learning modes, made it easier for me to pursue further studies while balancing my responsibilities at home and work,” Naidu said.

“This is my ninth year of teaching. I never planned to take economics classes but with the shortage of teachers in my previous school I was asked to teach commercial studies. I took up the opportunity and to my surprise enjoyed teaching it especially when I

By Zalika Ali



Deepika Naidu receives her award from Pro-Chancellor Pundit Bhuwan Dutt

observed students’ understanding and excitement for the subject.

“This encouraged me to continue taking the classes.”

Naidu overcame many difficulties while pursuing her studies, “especially with time management, juggling between

lesson planning, school commitments, and family responsibilities.”

There were other difficulties such as with internet connectivity during online classes or while submitting assignments.

“However, with proper planning, dedication, and support from the UniFiji team, I was able to overcome these hurdles.

“Our society often expects women to juggle multiple roles, and I was no exception. There were moments of exhaustion and self-doubt, but I reminded myself of my goals. I prioritised, stayed organised, and remained focused.”

“It wasn’t easy, but with perseverance and a strong support system, I made it through,” Naidu said.

“I’m grateful for the opportunity and support that UniFiji provided.”

‘Most outstanding student’

ONE of the University’s first journalism students has graduated as the most outstanding student this year.

Seran Devi, 24, was awarded her bachelor’s degree in Journalism and Media Studies at the graduation ceremony earlier this year.

Journalism was never a first choice for Devi.

“Even though it wasn’t my first choice, the course challenged me in ways I never expected and helped me find my voice,” she said.

The programme combined theory with practical, hands-on learning, which

gave a solid foundation to understand the real-world media landscape.

“I appreciated how our classes encouraged critical thinking, creativity, and ethical reporting – skills that are so important today,” Devi said.

“What stood out the most was the support from our lecturers; they genuinely cared about our progress and pushed us to do better.

“Being part of the first-ever journalism cohort made the experience even more meaningful, and I’ll always be proud to say I was part of something new and impactful,” Devi said.

‘Proud moment’ as a pioneer finishes her course

Simran Shyleen Dass, one of the university’s first journalism graduates, spoke of her learning and growth during her course.

“I was part of the first group of students in this programme, which made it even more special. Being in the first batch meant we were starting something new. We didn’t have previous students to guide us, but we supported each other and grew together,” said Dass.

“Graduating as part of the first

batch of students was an especially proud moment for me. We were all pioneers in this new academic journey, and there was a sense of camaraderie and shared purpose among my peers.

“We celebrated not just our academic achievements but also the contributions we had made in shaping the future of journalism at the University of Fiji.

“The graduation marked not only the culmination of our studies but also the beginning of our careers in a field

that demands constant learning and adaptability”, she says.

She gave special thanks to her professors, mentors and colleagues who she said guided and supported her along the way.

“This programme has instilled in me a strong foundation in journalism, and I look forward to continuing my work in this dynamic field with a sense of responsibility, creativity, and a commitment to making a positive impact on society,” said Dass.

Simran Dass with her father Parvin and mother Ashika Anjaline





Student research to help decide renewable future

By Katherine Naidu

In a groundbreaking collaboration between Aegis Energy UK and the University of Fiji, students have found themselves at the forefront of a renewable energy revolution.

Tasked with mapping diesel generator usage in islands, the young researchers are contributing critical data to help shape Fiji's clean energy future.

"Students were asked to get a wide range of coverage with their data collecting going all the way to Levuka, Savusavu, Yasawa, and also covering the major cities and towns," says Rodney Vakaloloma, the Vice-President Internal of University of Fiji Students Association.

The Aegis Energy UK project is an international initiative that seeks to explore affordable and high-tech renewable solutions, particularly wind and solar hybrid systems for communities in Fiji.

The project offered students the chance to take part in research with a national impact.

The research was to assess diesel generator usage, especially in rural and maritime communities, where grid access is unreliable or non-existent. By understanding where and how



Jack Saville, of Aegis UK, leads a training session on data collection

diesel is used, policymakers can design strategies for a cleaner, more sustainable energy use.

"Ten undergraduate researchers deployed structured questionnaires across 50 households, 25 private businesses, and 25 public sector institutions. Meanwhile, five postgraduate and master's students conducted hour-long interviews with policymakers to gain deeper insights," Mr Vakaloloma said.

Analysis of the research is continuing, but preliminary results point to a clear divide between sectors.

Commercial and public institutions rely heavily on diesel

generators, largely due to frequent power cuts, while households appear more open to moving toward renewable energy, motivated by environmental concerns and cost savings.

This kind of data is exactly what Fiji needs. It gives a snapshot of how widespread diesel use is, where the needs are greatest, and where change is possible.

The project also provided an invaluable learning opportunity for the students involved, improving practical skills such as data collection and time management. It was also the first exposure to large-scale research for

some, setting a strong foundation for future academic and professional work.

"Our students now know how to approach policymakers, how to conduct interviews in formal settings, and how to manage a research project under pressure," Mr Vakaloloma said.

Their findings may soon inform where and how renewable technologies like solar and wind power are deployed across Fiji.

The students had "a great time taking part in the Aegis Energy UK project and would definitely agree to taking part in future projects", Mr Vakaloloma said.

Struggle pays off for new journalism graduates



IT'S always exciting when the first batch of students in a programme graduate, ready to go out into the world and put to use all the knowledge they acquired during their university years.

I felt very proud to see the very first Journalism and Media Studies (JMS) students graduate from the University, with their families and friends witnessing the momentous event.

It was a struggle for these students as it is never easy to be pioneers in a new programme but, with the guidance of their lecturers who are all senior journalists in Fiji and abroad, they made it with flying colours. The photographs in this edition of UniFiji Watch graphically show just how relieved and happy these students were to reach the end of their challenging period of study.

I believe all were employed almost immediately after graduation. It shows just how appreciative the industry is of their JMS qualifications and training, which included newsroom-based work experience from the first semester of their degree programme.

This edition of UniFiji Watch rightly concentrates on the JMS graduates' achievements. As a former journalist myself (although I think journalists remain journalists for life despite other careers and experiences they may have during their lifetime), I can see that we are living in strange times for those reporting the news in Fiji.

Not only is new technology, such as AI, a challenge, but the state of the planet, as well as never-ending domestic and international conflicts, put to the test both journalistic perspective and honour as well as the ability to cut through the noise and report the facts.

Fiji is going through yet another period of unease and we hope that the new graduates we have trained are able to report the stories with integrity, forthrightness and courage.

Those who trained our JMS students are themselves considered to be the best in the business and the University feels confident that the foundation they laid will stay with the graduates in time to come.

I encourage the lecturers to continue to mentor their former students and to provide them with the support they will undoubtedly need as they try to navigate through the difficulties ahead. I hope the graduates will take advantage of the wisdom available in our cohort of JMS lecturers and continue to make us proud.

How the Covid epidemic fundamentally changed the way we live, work and study

By Zalika Ali

FIVE years ago, a once-in-a-lifetime experience left many of us changed forever. The havoc and upheaval that Covid 19 caused, and the grief and desolation it brought, have left the country and our communities scarred – and hopefully better prepared for the next time.

The University acted fast to adapt to the massively changed circumstances.

The Registrar, Nathasha Mudaliar, said the university was now well prepared. Classes could be conducted online, and there were online platforms for enrolments and examinations.

"The Covid 19 resilience has made us stronger as an organisation. It helped us to embrace technology better.

"Also the adaptation to hyflex mode from traditional approach enables students to be prepared to learn online if a situation requires them to fully switch to online learning."

Nationally, indications of the changes ahead started coming in early January 2020 when we started hearing about the first Covid cases in China. The numbers quickly built up, and soon there were reports from other parts of world. It became obvious the Corona virus was spreading quickly, helped along by jet travel across and between continents.

The Fiji authorities acted quickly to try to impede the entry of the virus, but it was only a matter of time before the first case was reported, on

Intense pressure for aspiring doctor

AALIA ALI, right, who has a year left of her six-year course to become a doctor, told of her concerns during Covid and how she dealt with it.

"Looking back I realise just how much Covid-19 affected my studies during some of the most important academic years of my life.

"In 2020, I was part of the Year 13 batch, a crucial year where everything was meant to set the foundation for my future.

"But instead, we were hit with the first wave of the pandemic. Overnight our schools closed and learning moved online.

"It was a sudden shift and we weren't prepared. The pressure of doing well in external exams while trying to adjust to virtual learning was overwhelming. No physical classes, no group studies, no face-



to-face learning, no relating examples of teachers.

"It all made understanding and staying motivated really difficult.

"Then came 2021, and I started

university as a first-year MBBS student filled with excitement and dreams of becoming a doctor.

"But before we could even settle in properly the second wave hit and everything went back online.

"This time it affected me even more. Medicine is not a course you can fully learn through slides and lectures. It needs labs, practicals, and patient interaction.

"Without those, concepts felt abstract, and learning was much harder.

"I remember feeling like something was missing in my journey. But despite it all I kept going and those tough years taught me resilience and the importance of adapting even when things don't go as planned."

March 19, 2020, in Lautoka. The person had recently travelled abroad, and the authorities moved fast to isolate him and identify all those he had been in contact with after landing in Fiji.

The country quickly went into lockdown in Lautoka and Suva, and other areas instituted strict measures to try to keep the virus at bay.

As of June last year, at least 1,018 people were confirmed to have died of Covid directly, according to WHO and Fiji Ministry of Health figures.

More than 69,000 people eventually caught the illness, mainly in the Lautoka-Nadi region and the Suva-Nausori corridor. But there were

cases in Vanua Levu also, and a few on outlying islands which were protected to some extent by travel restrictions and because of distance from the main population centres.

In March 2021, Fiji became the first country in the Pacific to start protecting its population when 12,000 doses of Astrazeneca vaccine arrived.

As then prime minister Frank Bainimarama said, "These vaccines represent more than the way back to normal life; they are the shot of life our economy, our industries, and thousands of Fijian breadwinners need."

The virus had left the country reeling. Many Fijians faced stress,

anxiety, and depression due to isolation, job losses, and financial uncertainty.

Domestic violence increased as victims were trapped with their abusers during lockdowns; schools across closed, forcing students to rely on remote learning, which itself was challenging due to limited internet access in rural areas.

There were cultural changes as traditional gatherings, church services and even kava sessions were restricted or banned.

A semblance of normality has since returned, but the scars remain, and life has changed.



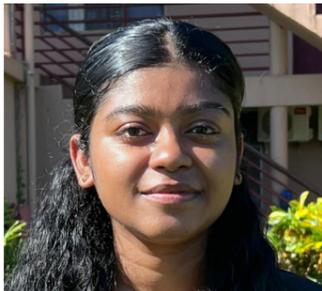
UniFiji Watch



The University of Fiji
(An Entity of Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji)

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YOUR SAY – How are you guarding yourself against dengue fever?



Tejal Nand- Second year MBBS
By having window and door mosquito nets and using repellents when outdoors.. This helps me to protect myself against dengue fever.



Nivshal Raj – First year BIT
I wear long sleeves and pants to protect myself against dengue fever.



Nihad Ali- Second Year BIT
Dengue fever is very dangerous. I was a victim of dengue fever since then I take extra precautions by destroying mosquito breeding places



Mere Namoce- First year Public health
I am protecting myself from dengue fever by sleeping under mosquito nets and also I have installed screens in my windows.



Anasimeci Liso- Second year nursing student.
Dengue fever is a contagious disease and I protect myself by destroying the breeding places by emptying hollow containers.

Poetry day shines light on Ukraine strife

By **Tanisha Bi**

A vibrant celebration on the theme of “Peace and Unity for All” helped mark World Poetry Day at the The University of Fiji.

This annual event was initiated by Unesco (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) in 1999.

This year it was integrated into the University’s Tusitala seminar series and organised by the staff of the Language, Literature, and Communication department, according to LLC head Dr Kamala Naicker.

“Poetry has been taught at the University both at undergraduate level and postgraduate level,” Dr Naicker said.

Staff and students took part in this year’s events, contributing original poems reflecting the theme of unity and peace.

Notably, the poems were composed in English, Hindi, and i-Taukei, all adhering to the free-verse form.

The event also touched on global issues through the lens of poetry.

Dr Naicker shared the story behind her poem, “Ukraine, Splendid Suns”, which was featured in the programme booklet.

It was inspired by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the struggles faced by women, she explained.

“In my poem Ukraine, Splendid Suns, I wanted to show how women are struggling, what Putin is doing to the Ukraine women and how innocent people and children are being killed. This country is fighting for its land and power, where innocent life is being taken. This is what made me write the poem.”

Dr Naicker said she was encouraged to take part when she received an online newsletter from an Australian women’s organisation seeking contributions related to the Ukraine war.

She was encouraged by a friend to submit her work.



Dr Kamala Naicker, and below, the Ukrainian flag



Ukraine, Splendid Suns

*One cannot count the moons that shimmer on Ukraine’s roofs,
Or the thousand splendid suns hidden behind her walls
Nor the beauty of Ukraine and of its cultural triumphs
Scented flowers represent hope for a new Ukraine
Beauty grows out of chaos and destruction*

*Flowers grow everywhere symbols of hope
Our children are flowers
Highlight the tragedy, forcing us to remember
What it used to be
As we visit the prayer places
Before destruction.*

*The beauty of Ukraine lives on in love and sacrifice
We develop together
The children are the splendid suns
Who refuse to yield to despair
Reflecting the incomparable beauty of Ukraine
When it happens, when Ukraine is free
The children must see it too, they’ll see it through our eyes*

*Nothing is more potent than one’s home, a thousand splendid suns
The powerful image of women as “splendid suns”
Tie in with women’s strength, their importance to Ukraine society.
The people of Ukraine shine with the bursting radiance of a thousand suns.*

Kamala Lakshmi Naiker

The editorial team for this edition



This edition of UniFiji Watch was produced by a team of journalism students led by Tanisha Bi, left, and including Zalika Ali, Avitesh Ram and Katherine Naidu.

It’s the seventh issue of the newspaper started tentatively four years ago by a group of students who were the first in the university’s journalism

department, and who this year graduated as fully-fledged journalists.

Publishing the paper gave the students first-hand experience of planning and producing a publication

Earlier editions of UniFiji Watch can be found at <https://www.unifiji.ac.fj/nifiji-watch-student-online-paper/>



From left: Zalika Ali, Avitesh Ram and Katherine Naidu