



VITAL ANAESTHESIA SIMULATION TRAINING

VAST Facilitator Course – Suva, Fiji
September 23-24, 2022

VAST “Lite” – Warwick, Fiji
September 26-29, 2022

Course report - Stephen Middleton



Executive summary

Situation

After a pandemic related pause in course activity for more than two years, the Vital Anaesthesia Simulation Training (VAST) Facilitator course and a VAST “Lite” course were requested to be delivered in Fiji, to coincide with the Pacific Society of Anaesthetists Annual General Meeting.

Background

The VAST Course was developed to teach and reinforce essential clinical practices and non-technical skills for both anaesthesia providers and perioperative teams. VAST was first piloted in 2018. Since then, VAST Courses have been offered multiple times in seven countries: Rwanda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, India, Fiji, Canada, and Australia. Additional courses planned for 2020 and 2021 were cancelled due to the global pandemic. During the pause in course delivery, the VAST team focussed on developing new teaching materials, refining curricula and establishing an online platform to support hybrid in-person and online learning. With the gap in-person training for several years, many VAST facilitators had not been able to apply their facilitation skills during courses. People expressed being out of practice, feeling “rusty”, a loss of confidence and a sense of isolation. Having previously run a VAST course in Fiji and with considerable interest in furthering the development of local VAST facilitation capacity, a Facilitator Course was planned to train Fijian and Pacific Islander anaesthetists who could then apply these facilitation skills in a streamlined VAST “Lite” course that would immediately follow the Facilitator Course and would take place at the same time as the PSA’s AGM.

Assessment

The VAST Facilitator Course and VAST “Lite” Course were both very well received. There was tremendous interest and, indeed, more participant requests than could be accommodated. There was representation from 8 different Pacific Island nations. The feedback from both courses was very positive and participants expressed satisfaction with the practical aspects of facilitation and simulation training as well as the revised facilitator course curriculum.

Recommendation

Course participants have been encouraged to stay connected via the VAST’s Slack communication platform, a recently implemented resource established to support VAST facilitator communication. Ongoing delivery of VAST content in the Pacific Islands is now well positioned to be coordinated through local champions in Fiji, ideally with ongoing support for mentorship from a senior VAST instructor. Additionally, it should be a priority to identify and train a local VAST simulation coordinator to provide ongoing logistical support to VAST programming in the Pacific. Finally, the expansion of VAST Course participation to interprofessional colleagues, in particular nursing and surgical teams, should be pursued.

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Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge financial support for the VAST Facilitator Course and VAST Lite from the:

- Pacific Society of Anaesthetists
- Australian Society of Anaesthetists (ASA)
- Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada
- World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists (WFSA)
- Department of Anesthesia, Pain Management and Perioperative Medicine, Dalhousie University

Facilitator Course Attendees

Instructors

- Stephen Middleton – Canada
- Gavin Tansley – Canada
- Tom Druit – Australia
- Michelle Murray (coordinator) – Canada

Participants

- Selesia Fifita – Tonga
- Cecilia Vaai-Bartley – Samoa
- Christian Leepo – Vanuatu
- Gabriel Pauu – Cook Islands
- Teokotai Maea – Cook Islands
- Mingota Herculano – East Timor
- Ieli Fakraufon – Fiji
- Meg Walmsley – Fiji/Australia
- Victor Fesaitu – Fiji
- Kenton Biribo – Fiji
- Shem Bavou – Fiji
- Eunice Onisimo – Fiji
- Lisepa Mila – Fiji
- Alice Goldsmith – Australia

VAST Lite course attendees

Instructors

- Stephen Middleton – Canada
- Gavin Tansley – Canada
- Michelle Murray (coordinator) – Canada

Facilitators

- Selesia Fifita – Tonga
- Cecilia Vaai-Bartley – Samoa
- Christian Leepo – Vanuatu
- Gabriel Pauu – Cook Islands
- Teokotai Maea – Cook Islands
- Mingota Herculano – East Timor
- Ieli Fakraufon – Fiji
- Meg Walmsley – Fiji/Australia
- Victor Fesaitu – Fiji
- Kenton Biribo – Fiji
- Shem Bavou – Fiji
- Eunice Onisimo – Fiji
- Lisepa Mila – Fiji
- Alice Goldsmith – Australia

Participants

- Asela Mamedre – Fiji
- Neeraj Sharma – Fiji
- Siale Hausia – Tonga
- Amanaki Puniani – Tonga
- Fa’amuamua Arasi – Samoa
- Jenny Sigoto – Solomon Islands
- Maria Piedade – East Timor
- Sovaia Qarau – Fiji
- Emily Fuakilau – Fiji
- Low Low Fifita – Tonga
- Corleone Vaai – Samoa
- Delwyn Pitakoe – Solomon Islands
- Tetikannari Toom – Kiribati
- Phil Temakon - Vanuatu

Venue and equipment

The venue for the VAST Facilitator Course was the Fiji National University Medical School Campus in Suva, Fiji. It was ideally located and well apportioned for our purposes. The campus had more than enough rooms for large group and breakout sessions. There were computer and projector equipment that were up to date and which worked easily for our teaching purposes. The university staff were responsive to our inquiries and were very helpful in meeting our course needs. Coordination of the venue and communication with university staff was arranged through our local VAST team members, specifically Drs. Eunice Onisimo and Kenton Biribo. Having previously hosted a VAST course in Fiji, there was an entire set of VAST equipment and no new simulation materials were required. There were some minor challenges with the age of the iPads that were used for the SimMON app, a reflection of their age and their decreasing ability to maintain a battery charge.

The venue for VAST Lite was the Warwick Hotel Fiji and their conference centre. The hotel is exceptionally well apportioned and as an “all inclusive resort” not the typical venue for a VAST Course. However, the coordination with the PSA’s annual general meeting and our tailored VAST “Lite” allowed for a shared venue and a truly remarkable experience for our facilitators and participants alike. The hotel exceeded our needs in providing a designated conference room and adjoining patio for our simulation sessions. The conference room was air-conditioned and had ample space for both simulation and debriefing. The adjoining patio was more crowded but nonetheless suited our needs. The heat and wind occasionally made the simulation experience challenging, but the space was suitable and would remain our choice were the experience to be repeated. Given the absence of any didactic teaching sessions, there was no need for audio-visual equipment, however this would also have been accommodated per the hotel were the need to arise.

Programme

The VAST Facilitator Course ran from September 23 through September 24, 2022. This was one of the first courses to be run using the new Facilitator Course content and the updated facilitator handbooks. This was likewise the first time any of the Fijian team had undertaken a VAST Facilitator Course. Only four of the new facilitators had previously participated in a standard VAST course, 2.5 years ago and prior to the pandemic-imposed hold on our programming in Fiji. Despite the large time gap and the fact that only a small minority of the facilitator course participants had previous VAST experience, they took to the materials and teaching with ease.

Both the simulation design sessions and the facilitation practise sessions were particularly well received and high yield. These were felt to be essential to the facilitator course content and helped prepare the participants, particularly those without prior VAST experience, to facilitate the upcoming VAST Lite course. While facilitator courses have traditionally been two-days, for those with no prior VAST experience it might be beneficial to allow additional time for scenario design and facilitation practise, where feasible.

Participants in the course were explicitly encouraged to come to the course having done the pre-reading and having thought about simulation ideas that were locally relevant and feasible to simulate with the VAST standard equipment. This proved very successful; candidates invariably raised trauma, obstetrics, and burnout as content that they felt imperative to incorporate into their own VAST Course local content and for which the VAST Course is uniquely suited.

Lastly, as a note of feedback on the revised Facilitator course curriculum, the didactic teaching sessions were particularly well received and indeed nearly all of them ran over-time due to participant engagement, questions, and follow-up conversation. This speaks to the high quality of these curriculum revisions and the appreciation participants had for the conceptual framing that characterizes VAST's simulation pedagogy.

VAST "Lite" ran for four days, September 26 to 29, 2022, during the afternoons only. Unlike a typical VAST Course with whole day sessions of simulation and didactic content delivery, the VAST "Lite" Course was paired with the Pacific Society of Anaesthetists' annual general meeting, whose sessions ran during the morning and whose afternoons were left deliberately open in order to allow PSA conference participants to attend the VAST programming in the afternoon. Demand for the course was very high and we were able to accommodate approximately 2/3 of the PSA conference participants. The high level of coordination and sanction by the PSA conference provided a tremendous boost to the interest and engagement for our course and we were in the enviable position of having to waitlist applicants who wished to take part in VAST Lite.

In order to accommodate the shorter time frame, we delivered only the simulation sessions of the standard VAST Course and opted to forego all of the didactic teaching sessions. The programming consisted of two scenarios delivered to two groups each afternoon. The facilitators trained in the days immediately preceding the course were effectively independent in their delivery of this course. As instructors, we provided logistical and equipment setup support, but the running of the scenarios and their debrief was entirely in the hands of the newly minted facilitators.

Summary of Evaluations

Participant evaluations from both the Facilitator Course and VAST Lite were overwhelmingly positive and the written feedback emphasized the appreciation for the practical elements of both courses. Participants of the Facilitator Course valued the opportunity to design their own simulation scenarios but even more so emphasized the appreciation for the facilitation practise. Future Facilitator Courses might consider incorporating this feedback through having less emphasis on the didactic components and more opportunities for facilitation practise. The course feedback also identified the high level of organization, programming flexibility, the high-quality catering, and the value of the VAST debriefing format in broader clinical and professional contexts.

Challenges and Lessons Learnt

Despite some initial delay in confirming course attendance and the availability of accommodation, the courses generally had very few setbacks. The major concern with accommodation was largely a function of the concurrent PSA conference and with assistance from the conference convener, we were able to find accommodation for all instructors. Early booking and consistent communication were the saving grace for this challenge. Notwithstanding Fiji's self-professed reputation for "Fiji time," course participants were without exception punctual and fully prepared for the courses.

Future Directions

Based on the tremendous success of the facilitators trained during the initial facilitator course and their capable delivery of the content of the subsequent course, it was felt that the VAST "train the trainer" pedagogy was nearly complete. In particular, local champions Drs. Kenton Biribo and Eunice Onisimo have demonstrated the ability to organize and deliver a very high-quality VAST Course.

The position and work of a VAST simulation coordinator is still unfilled at this point and the "behind the scenes" work that a simulation coordinator performs is still perhaps lacking, thus future VAST involvement would likely require a senior instructor present for high level mentorship as well as an experienced VAST simulation coordinator with an explicit focus on recruiting and training a local coordinator for ongoing, independent VAST programming in Fiji and the larger Pacific.

Other avenues for ongoing VAST involvement should focus on recruitment of interprofessional participants, in particular nursing staff and surgical colleagues, whose interest is certainly present but who have not yet had the opportunity.

Course Photos





