



UROLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

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Urologists recall heroic colleagues on 10th Anniversary of Christchurch Earthquake

On the 10th anniversary of the Christchurch earthquake members of the Urological Society of Australia and New Zealand (USANZ) are reflecting on the 185 lives lost, and remembering the efforts of friends and colleagues caught in the natural disaster including those involved in heroic rescue efforts.

On 22nd February 2011 around 800 urologists and delegates from Australia, New Zealand, Europe, the United States and Asia were in Christchurch for the USANZ Annual Scientific meeting.

Delegates were in the Christchurch Convention Centre in the heart of the city or nearby hotels when the earthquake struck just before 1pm. Amid much panic, fear and confusion most were evacuated to nearby Hagley Park.

However, a number of urologists joined first responders, putting themselves at considerable personal risk to help rescue people trapped in collapsed buildings even as they continued to rock with strong aftershocks.

Among the rescuers, Ballarat urologist Lydia Johns Putra crawled into a dark, confined space to perform life-saving surgery, using only a pocket knife and hacksaw, to amputate the trapped legs of a man who was bleeding heavily so he could be freed from the unstable building in time to get to hospital.

“The Urological Society is proud of the way the urologists showed leadership and also assisted to help where it was needed as the disaster unfolded,” said Dr Stephen Mark, President of the Urological Society.

Following the earthquake the USANZ Christchurch Bravery Medal was struck with metal salvaged from a building destroyed in the quake and subsequently awarded to Drs Lydia Johns-Putra, Stuart Phillip from Brisbane, Julian Shah from London and Stephen Mark from Christchurch.

Dr David Malouf, President of the USANZ at the time of the meeting co-ordinated communications with government and relevant agencies to ensure the safety and well-being of the hundreds of stranded visitors left without their belongings, including passports, or accommodation.

“The generosity and goodwill of the Christchurch community to reach out and assist visitors to their city during the tragedy was extraordinary. On this sombre anniversary I am sure I speak for all those who were there in expressing gratitude for their care, sympathy for their losses and admiration of the Christchurch and New Zealand spirit as it continues to rebuild its beautiful city.”

The Christchurch Medal for Bravery recipients:

Lydia Johns Putra, Ballarat, Vic

Lydia Johns Putra was part of a team that performed bilateral above-the-knee amputation to free a man trapped under concrete in a collapsed building in Central Christchurch, shortly after the earthquake struck.

Her only instrument was a pocket knife with a saw to perform the surgery. At considerable personal risk, Lydia crawled under tonnes of concrete to perform the life saving surgery in an unstable building that continued to be rocked by large aftershocks.

Stephen Mark, Christchurch, NZ

Stephen Mark provided medical assistance to the injured in the Arts Centre, before searching for survivors in the collapsed Cathedral. He then went on to aid three people trapped on the top floor of The Press Building. After accessing the roof via a cage suspended from a crane, Stephen entered the partially collapsed structure through a hole cut by the rescue team and despite regular aftershocks, provided pain relief and support to two women trapped under debris for several hours until they were extricated.

Stuart Phillip, Brisbane, Queensland

Stuart Phillip demonstrated leadership, skill and bravery along with Lydia Johns Putra in a precarious situation atop a destroyed building resuscitating, operating on, and attempting to retrieve injured persons. Stuart's communication skills, lateral thinking in co-ordinating along with Lydia, setting up an emergency resuscitation and triage service made him invaluable to the operation.

Julian Shah, England UK

Julian Shah assisted in the rescue of a woman trapped on the top floor of the severely damaged Christchurch Press Building. After negotiating the last two flights of stairs, which had been reduced to rubble, on his hands and knees he assisted the trapped and severely injured victim until she was freed from under a beam and transferred to a crane rescue bucket. At that moment a severe aftershock further damaged the stairs and upper floors leaving Julian and his fellow rescuers no choice but to jump onto the roof of the adjoining building – a gap of some 1.5 metres, five stories high.

Media enquiries:

Contact Edwina Gatenby: M. +61 402 130 254 E. edwina@maxicom.net.au

The Urological Society of Australia and New Zealand is the peak professional body for urological surgeons in Australia and New Zealand. Urologists are surgeons who treat men, women and children with problems involving the kidney, bladder, prostate and male reproductive organs. These conditions include cancer, stones, infection, incontinence, sexual dysfunction and pelvic floor problems.