



Closing the Loop

A large part of the work of MAF in Timor-Leste—around 80% of its programme activity—is based around the provision of medical evacuations (medevacs) to those in isolated places. Through their partnership with the Timorese Ministry of Health, each year MAF brings around 260 people into the capital Dili from the outlying districts for urgent treatment.

But until now, that is where our role has ended.

I will let Nick and Ruth Hitchins from New Zealand tell the story. Nick is serving as both pilot and Country Director in Timor-Leste, along with his wife Ruth and their children.



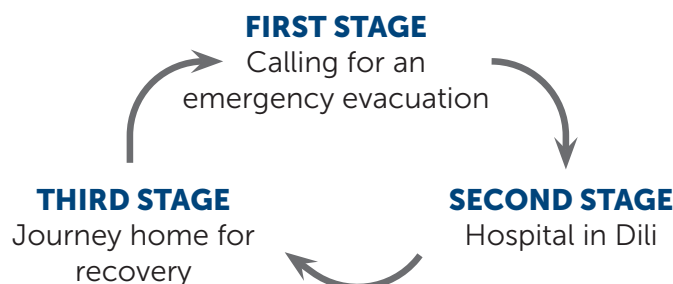
Nick, Ruth and their three children

Nick says, “Think about it for a moment. One day you are going about your life in a village you have known all your life. Then you become seriously sick. Or you may be a mother in labour and there is threat to the life of both you and your child. You are picked up by a MAF plane (terrifying because this is the first time you have ever flown) and suddenly find yourself in an unknown city and taken to a hospital that is anything but ideal. Most Timorese live surrounded by family, and this sudden separation adds yet another layer of stress and

sadness in an already difficult scenario. Then, if you recover, you are discharged from hospital onto the street with little or no money, no supplies, no family and no way (or the slow way) home.”

He continues, “We don’t think this is what the Lord had in mind for them, and we want to change this! What if we could ‘close the loop’ for people during this frightening and overwhelming experience and provide support through every step of the medevac journey?”

“Closing the Loop”





Ruth adds, **“Even the first stage of medevac experience can be a challenge.** Because most Timorese, even the highly educated, “know” that almost all mental and physical disease can be attributed to black magic, the family ancestral spirits or those that inhabit the trees and rocks, families often wait until a patient is critically ill before requesting a referral with MAF, by which time it may be too late. This in turn reinforces the prevailing fear that the arrival of a MAF plane does not represent “health, hope, and healing”—but apprehension and possible loss!

We are working with local communities to encourage them to contact us much earlier. We want to take a more preventative approach by removing the fear associated with being ‘taken away.’”



Family in Timor-Leste

The stay at the hospital in Dili is the second stage of the medevac experience.

Here there is a desperate need for a friendly face and someone who can offer spiritual and emotional support. Someone who speaks your language and understands what you are going through.

In response to this, MAF Timor-Leste urgently wants to hire a part-time chaplain (20 hours a week) who can walk alongside the patient during their time in hospital here. What a powerful witness to be able to visit the sick in hospital, offer chaplaincy services that transform the experience of the sick (and sometimes dying), providing them with a connection to Christ throughout the time of their illness.

At the same time, hospitals in Timor-Leste expect family members to take care of a patient’s basic needs. But what if there no family to help? MAF wants to provide in-hospital care packs which would include fresh water, blankets and food. Each pack would make all the difference to the patient.



Finally, the third stage of the medevac journey is getting people back home to their remote village, where they can recover surrounded by family and friends.

Nick picks up the story. “What if we were able to offer a fast, comfortable return home—in the same plane that brought them here, closing the loop, being the Christ who walks through the valley of the shadow of death and out the other side?”

By offering subsidised airfares home (for the same \$10-\$20 cost as a local bus fare)

we would be able to “close the loop” in the evacuee’s journey from critical illness through to a reunion with their families.

Imagine the joyful reunions as the MAF plane returns that much loved patient to their home in near perfect health!



A care pack provided by MAF.



Nick handing out a care pack, left; the MAF team in Timor-Leste.

Will you help us close the loop? What greater impact in Christ's name can there be? This would surely tell them that they are loved and supported by the MAF family all over the world. By taking time to step into the patient's shoes and see things from their perspective, you can understand how care packs and a chaplain will vastly improve MAF's scope of service in Timor-Leste as they bring health, hope and healing on a grass-roots level—which will be a powerful witness to everyone involved.

Dealing with illness in a country with extremely limited health care is a major hurdle for our patients. With your help, <Salutation>, we can make all the difference—thank you so much for your support!



Mark Fox,
MAF NZ CEO



Please note; this is a tax deductible donation.

Yes, I want to help "Close the Loop" in Timor-Leste!

Please accept this one off gift of **\$55, \$105, \$210** or \$_____ (please specify)

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