



Mission: Papua New Guinea
Frontline: My first mission
MSF Volunteer: Vitaly Pak

As I was getting ready for my mission to Papua New Guinea to work as a logistician, I had so many thoughts racing through my mind about the place, people, culture, work and how to cope living away from my family for 12 long months. This was to be my first mission as an international staff member, after eight years working for MSF in my home country. Working as a logistician would mean being a vital part of the medical program. I would be responsible for the supply of drugs and essential materials, as well as training and managing the local logistics team.



introduced to the team. Everyone was very welcoming and smiling.

I had my security briefing and was introduced to the project. Lae is a supply hub and transit point for a second project, in the highlands of Tari. We were also responsible for keeping part of the country's emergency preparedness stock. The project in Tari provides medical and psychosocial support to the survivors of family and sexual violence.

The next morning I saw patients in the waiting area when I came to work. It was heartrending to see women who had been beaten, along with their children. For the next three days I counted the medical and non-medical stocks, supplies crucial for keeping the program running. I needed to have a clear picture of what we had, and also to implement MSF standard software called Logisticx7 which helps manage the supply chain, and which had not been used in the project until then. The logistician who worked there before me had been evacuated out of the country due to an

injury, so my handover was done by the project coordinator, who was very experienced and very nice to work and stay with.

Over the course of my one-year mission I made many changes in the logistics department. The department consisted of a supply logistician, a logistics assistant, a finance and administration assistant, a storekeeper, five drivers, five guards and two domestic staff. I had to recruit a storekeeper and replace the supply log as well as some drivers and guards. After recruiting the new staff members, we started on-the-job training, on how proper standard storekeeping and supply, as well as on following standard technical procedures with regard to the project's vehicle fleet, inventory, etc.

The team was eager to learn, but I needed time to evaluate their knowledge and experience. I had to change my training style, and had to plan how to coach them in areas like computer skills. There was also the issue of many of the staff members arriving late to work, or missing work completely, due to transport problems or tribal fights in their settlements. Often they could not warn me they were going to be late, because their phones had been stolen (which is the usual thing there), or their phones were not charged, as they do not have electricity in their houses.

The work there was certainly challenging, but it was also very interesting. The movements of international staff in the area were limited, due to the security situation, and we used VHF radios at all times to inform the base about our movements. We were also not allowed to walk far from our house, and could go to permitted locations by car only.



I really enjoyed my year working in Papua New Guinea. I was proud of my team, and of all the improvements they made during the period. I was also proud to have an opportunity to be a part of the very important and useful work that MSF is doing in that region, and I see a big need for such services there.

By the time my mission was over, I had a lot of mixed feelings about leaving: happiness, because I was going home to see my family; sadness, because I was leaving the place where I had lived for so long, and leaving people and a whole different style of life; and satisfaction, from the work that I had done. I also had the feeling that there were still a lot of things to be improved in the logistics department, and I was happy that my replacement was an experienced logistician who would be able to teach the team and share his experience with them.

-Vitaly Pak, Logistician