

# ACT medical firm wins award with healthy growth

By Sally Pryor

From clearing public hospital waiting lists in England to providing health care for Australian personnel in the Solomon Islands, Aspen Medical sees export opportunities where others just see gaps in the health sector.

Providing everything from people and equipment to advice and public health strategies all over the world, the Canberra-based company has grown steadily over the past nine years, and now has offices in New Guinea, Canada, England, America, Indonesia, Singapore, the Solomon Islands and Timor.

The company added to its growing list of accolades last week, winning in the large services category at the Australian Export Awards.

Managing director Glenn Keys, an engineer who set up the company in 2003 with friend and business partner Andrew Walker, said while health services did not immediately come to mind in the export market, the opportunities had opened up almost immediately once they began looking.

"In actual fact, the perceived need we saw was an export opportunity, and our first three contracts were all offshore, before we did any work in Australia," he said.

Their first contract was to review how orthopaedic surgery was conducted in England, and then to help clear waiting lists for hip and knee replacements and minor orthopaedic procedures across the country.

Aspen then picked up the contract to work with Australian personnel in the Solomon Islands, and since then, the business has spread to the aid sector, non-government organisations, international oil and gas companies and indigenous health in Australia, as well as state-run public health facilities.

"We've provided over 1200 health professionals into the Northern Territory in the last three years, supporting Aboriginal medical services throughout the Northern Territory, as part of the Close the Gap initiative, so that's been a major success and something we're so very proud of," he said.

The company has staff all over the world, including about 100 in the Middle East, but has maintained its base in Canberra, with offices in Deakin.

It nevertheless made headlines when its staff were first on the scene when East Timorese president Jose Ramos-Horta was shot by would-be assassins in 2008.

The medical team performed emergency surgery on Mr Ramos-Horta to remove two bullets from his stomach, before transferring him to Darwin for further treatment, and was later presented with the Timor-Leste Solidarity Medal.

In 2009, *Business Review Weekly* named Aspen Medical as the most successful company in Australia with a turnover of less than \$100 million (the company has since grown to exceed that figure), and Mr Keys said last week's award was a source of immense pride.

"It means an enormous amount to us, to have recognition at this level," he said.

"When you see the standard of Australian companies that are exporting, you really see the competition that's out there, and to be recognised at this level... is fantastic."



**OVERSEAS POTENTIAL:** Aspen Medical managing director Glenn Keys says the company's first three contracts were all offshore. Photo: LANNON HARLEY