

Public Health Division – Case Study



Name: Minh Anh
Sex: Female
Age: 25 (in 2016)
Profession: Optometrist
Location: Hanoi, Vietnam
Program: Optometry Development
Funder: Optometry Giving Sight

Minh Anh was one of the first two candidates to receive a joint scholarship from the Brien Holden Vision Institute and Eye Care Foundation to study optometry in India. In June 2013, she completed her Bachelor of Optometry at Bausch and Lomb School of Optometry, L.V. Prasad Eye Institute, India.

During the four years of pursuing her studies, Minh Anh showed outstanding academic performance and graduated from the optometry school with a high distinction grade, one of only three students in her year to achieve this level.

Minh Anh has recently returned to Vietnam to work as an optometrist at the Vietnam National Institute of Ophthalmology (VNIO). Currently, she is working at the Refraction Department of VNIO and is in charge of the Contact Lens Clinic. Her main job is to perform eye examinations, provide contact lens consultations and fittings, as well as following up patients with refractive error, anisometropia, keratoconus, post Lasik corneal ectasia and other eye conditions.

Sharing her feelings about her role at VNIO she said, *“Being the new one in the team, I have received the support from ophthalmologists and nurses in the department and I am glad to contribute my*

knowledge to serve patients. I would love to practice and at the same time seek the opportunity for further studies.”

Minh Anh has returned to Vietnam at the right time it seems. Development of optometry education is being initiated by the Institute in collaboration with partner institutions in Vietnam. Besides clinical work at the hospital, Minh Anh is also actively involved in the project team at Hanoi Medical University preparing the training code application for the first optometry course in Vietnam. She has been very helpful and supportive to the team in performing the work assigned to her.

When asked to recall the time she decided to study optometry four years ago, Minh Anh spoke positively about her choice, explaining that since joining this field she feels she has never looked back and loves everything about it. Minh Anh also expressed her enjoyment of studying in India; a country with diverse cultures and well known for its medical expertise. She spoke of her extensive practical exposure to varying clinical eye conditions.

“Being an optometrist, I am glad to know that Vietnam is going to have an optometry course soon. However, to make it fit well into the society, it is important to increase the awareness of ‘optometry’ in the Ophthalmology Committee and the community. Optometry needs to be recognised widely in order to improve in future,” she said.

Minh Anh is expected to become an optometry educator for the optometry program in future. With her knowledge gained in India, together with her clinical experience and teaching skills now being accumulated at VNIO, Minh Anh will make a great contribution to optometry education in Vietnam as teacher. In order to prepare for her future role, Minh Anh has already participated in an EyeTeach – Training of Trainers Workshop conducted by the Institute. She has also presented on ‘The Role of Optometry in the Eye Care System in Vietnam’ at the National Ophthalmological Society conference in October, 2013.

PROFILE UPDATE: Minh Anh re-interviewed in 2017

- 1. We were wondering what was your main driving motivator for choosing a career in eye care/optometry? Could you tell us a little more detail about your early journey on this career path? Also what position do you currently work as?**

At the beginning I do not have much idea about Optometry, but it is a new profession in Vietnam, where it helps in correct visual problem for people. My mother is an ophthalmologist who has inspired me to choose the field. At few first year pursuing my 1st degree of Optometry I realize how important this profession is and get more motivated to complete the program and come back to Vietnam.

It has been 4 years since I graduated, I have completed another master degree while staying in Vietnam to support the establishment of Optometry program, contribute in teaching at Hanoi medical university as well as having a 1st 2 years working with numerous patients in Contact lens clinics of Vietnam National Institute of Ophthalmology.

Currently, I am focusing on teaching the young generation of Optometry Vietnam as their curriculum gets harder year by year, our job has increased. I am in charged of the program right now.

- 2. You are one of very few qualified optometrists in Vietnam – we are wondering if you have an experience that describes how it feels to be part of the bigger picture of increasing capacity for eye health across Vietnam? It could be a story about a student, patient or pivotal moment you remember from your daily work.**

For patients in Vietnam, they do not know what an Optometrist is, but I am so proud that there was few moments with patients that I love to share. A baby with aphakia was sent to me for a contact lens fitting 2 years ago. After fitting with contact lens, he now can see the world better, in stead of crying (you know most baby with contact lens fitting will be scared and cry a lot), he started explore who is around and smiled to his mother face. It is such a wonderful feeling when you know you can help some one.

Or another patient, who was diagnosed with keratoconus. Basically, he would need a contact lens but at that time there was no contact lens advised for him. His ophthalmologist suggested a penetrating keratoplasty (graft) and he processed. He visited me with 1 eye keratoconus, vision is some where counting finger at 3m, the other eye grafted and visual acuity is 20/400. He can't go to school, or completing his university entrance exam, and thus had to stay at home for another year to repeat the test. I consulted and fitted him with a contact lens. Right at the time of fitting, it brought him tears of joy to be able to read his text book which he pulled out in the exam room. I was moved.

During my time practicing in India, I have come across numerous patients who are poor, who are not able to see, and feeling so proud and glad to be able to help them. But only in Vietnam I feel Optometry is not just a career, but a mission and vision in developing this profession.

- 3. We understand you have close contact on a daily/weekly basis with the optometry students currently enrolled in the HMU optometry school – can you describe your experience with mentoring the students and how do you relate that experience to your own professional journey?**

I am currently working for Hanoi Medical University, which is a 115-year-old university and being the only School of Optometry in Hanoi for now. Our university has recruited the 3rd batch of Bachelor of Science in Optometry this September 2017 with 50+ students per batch. Together with Pham Ngoc Thach University in Ho Chi Minh City, we have in the whole nation of more than 200 Optometry students.

Students are wonderful. They are so young and enthusiastic to learn, hungry for knowledge and so passionate. Along with my team, we love sharing our knowledge and inspire them to be able to build up a strong foundation for Optometry Vietnam in future, to be able to provide better health care for people in Vietnam.

Compared to the time I was in India, we were less in number, more experts, better facilities and more equipment, students in Hanoi Medical University have a tough time. But with technology, we are trying our best to engage them to lectures, to practical classes, preparing them well for their future.

We hope to be able to guide them to a right direction.

- 4. What long term goals or lasting progress for optometry would you like to see unfold in Vietnam of the next five years? How will these goals or progress change the eye health landscape for the people of Vietnam?**

In next five years, there will be approximately 400 qualified Optometrists and 300 Optometry students. These will be able to serve eye care for 92 million people in Vietnam, to be able to reach out to rural area, help poor people, complete our mission to help people in Vietnam for better eye care.

Academically the university can have higher degree program for these, support them to be not just clinicians but researchers, lecturers and scientists. It is going to help Vietnam

- 5. Lastly, do you have a beneficial point of view or message of encouragement to anyone who reads your story to help them overcome the adversity and setbacks often encountered in development work in their own country, as you have in Vietnam?**

By graduating from BLSO I have increased the number of Optometrists in Vietnam by one third in 2013, we are now having 13 qualified Optometrists in the whole nation. But now we have had 2 schools of Optometry with more than 200 Optometry students, and this number is going to increase!

I know that we are still at the very beginning of the journey but I am really hope that with our hard work and the support from the all over the world we can develop Optometry in Vietnam to be able to reach out for a better eye care service.

Every journey started with one small step, we hope that we will overcome the challenges ahead.

- 6. If given the chance what message would you like to convey to all the funding partners, stakeholders, institutions and individuals that have helped you achieve your inspiring professional path so far?**

I would love to thanks all of institutes: Brien Holden Vision Institute, Eye Care Foundation, Sight For All, Optometry Giving Sight, etc and many individuals like Dr. May Ho, Ms. Huynh Phuong Ly, Prof. Pham Trong Van from Hanoi Medical University, many teachers and experts, and my team in Vietnam, who have always supported me, inspired me to study and to become an Optometrist. It is truly a bless for me.

I hope that I can take this inspiration and pass it on to our younger generation of Optometry in Vietnam.