

2003

Fellowship – Thailand

In 2003, medical practitioners were the only recognized and registered eye and vision care practitioners in Thailand. As in many other countries, there are optical stores that have opticians with varying competencies providing refractive care for the purpose of dispensing spectacles and contact lenses. Historically, there was no formal or qualified training programs for the opticians.

With the dream of seeing quality optometric eye and vision care of the American standard available to the people of Thailand, Weerachai Singhaniyom, PhD (a neuroscientist), through inspiration from members of the faculty at Indiana University (IU) School of Optometry, was overseeing the development of an optometry program at Ramkhamhaeng University (RU) in Bangkok, Thailand. The Thai optometry program was based on American optometry with a professional curriculum similar to that of IU. There was no similar program anywhere else in Asia at the time.

The first class of optometry students enrolled at RU in the summer of 2002. The School of Optometry at RU had an agreement of understanding entered into by the highest officers of IU and RU. At the time, faculty from IU traveled to Bangkok on a rotating basis to teach.

During the spring semester of 2003, R. Norman Bailey, MA, OD, MPH received a sabbatical leave from the University of Houston College of Optometry (UHCO), where he was a clinical professor, to assist in the optometry program's development at RU. He was sponsored by the World Council of Optometry, which provided a Fellowship for travel expenses. Dr. Bailey, an IU alumnus, was at RU for four months providing teaching and consultation services.

In addition to his duties at RU, Dr. Bailey continued his teaching responsibility for UHCO as the course master for the Community Health Optometry course by providing online instruction through previously recorded video lectures, online discussions, and the utilization of guest lecturers. This type of online instruction worked very well for an information course, though it would be less beneficial for a clinical procedures course. This effort was a case of distance education where the professor was off-campus and the students were on-campus at UHCO. The WCO Fellowship made this positive instructional experiment possible.

Dr. Bailey gave a poster presentation on this type of distance-instruction to the World Conference on Optometric Education sponsored by the World Council of Optometry in Milan Italy in May, 2006. The poster discussed the potential use of this teaching strategy for the sharing of optometric knowledge around the earth, without the costs typically associated with a visiting faculty member physically traveling to the students at a distant location.

On his return travel to the USA and with approval of the WCO, Dr. Bailey stopped for a few days in Japan to write a paper co-authored with Mitsuhsa Hayashi, O.D., an optometric professor in Japan, that was subsequently published as a guest editorial in the Journal of the American Optometric Association.