

**REPORT ON VIETNAM FELLOWSHIP AT HANOI MEDICAL UNIVERSITY IN
THE OPTOMETRY DEPARTMENT**

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INTRODUCTION

To eliminate avoidable blindness in developing countries, training human resources in the eye health is a priority. I am currently enrolled in the new graduate program titled “Residency program in Community at the University of Montreal.” One objective of this program is to educate residents who will eventually become involved in eye health development and delivery, following high clinical standards and using principles of sustainable global health practices. This project is a teaching internship in Vietnam at the Department of Optometry of Hanoi Medical University (HMU). My role was to contribute to the training of future Vietnamese optometrists by organizing and taking part in instructional academic activities. With the background in public health and development provided by the Residency in Community Optometry, I will also participate in activities related to the development of the emerging optometry programs.

OBJECTIVES OF THE TRAINING

The objectives of this 10-week teaching internship (shortened from 15 weeks due to COVID-19) was to use my optometry skills and work in the field of community optometry and global healthcare. This supervised experience was in a program which recognizes sustainable development and public healthcare principles. This project had the goal of improving my understanding of the reality of healthcare in a developing country (ex. accrued prevalence of uncorrected refraction errors, cataracts, diabetic retinopathy) and developing adapted interventions in an environment with limited resources.

The optometry program to which I contributed to at HMU, is implemented and supported by the Brien Holden Vision Institute (BHVI). BHVI’s strategy to address in a sustainable way the shortage in human resources includes the development and support of optometry schools globally. Working together with tertiary institutions and ministries of health and education, it seeks to develop, establish and support the profession of optometry in emergent countries where the need is greatest. Within this framework, and acting as the lead international implementing partner, it has enabled the development of 18 optometry programs in 13 countries, two of which are in Vietnam.

BHVI has been working with in-country partners in Vietnam to develop optometry education since 2010. There were only two optometrists serving a population of 90 million in 2008 and no optometry schools. Together with the University of Medicine Pham Ngoc Thach (UPNT) and HMU, it has successfully introduced the first two optometry courses in Vietnam in 2014 and

2015 respectively, leading to the first 12 native graduates in 2018 from UPNT. There are now over 300 optometry students enrolled in the two medical universities.

HMU opened the second optometry course in 2015 with an ambitious cohort of 63 optometry students. Located in the capital city of Hanoi in northern Vietnam, HMU is the oldest and most respected medical university in the country. With a history of over 100 years, it has a long tradition of producing highly qualified medical doctors, and is at the forefront of modernization and development of medical education. HMU recognized the gap in the eye care workforce and collaborated with the Institute and the Ministry of Education to develop and implement the optometry degree in the country. HMU attracts the best and brightest students in Vietnam.

Both universities have a history of collaboration with international partners to develop and deliver education programs.

The objectives of this project included:

- partnership and interdisciplinary and inter-faculty cooperation;
- international solidarity;
- research, innovation and knowledge development;
- engagement and social responsibility;
- knowledge transfer.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The immediate expected outcomes of this project were:

- Globally, it will contribute to the improvement of teaching and optometric care in Vietnam;
- The accomplishment of a first internship for a Resident in Community Optometry offered by the UdeM;
- Added visibility for optometry in Vietnam at its highest degree of competence;
- Exposure for the resident to low-resource settings, cultural exchange, increased awareness of difficult socio-economic conditions.

The medium-term expected outcomes of this project were:

- Enrichment of the optometry training offered to students of HMU Vietnam;

- Similarly, enrichment of the formation for residents in community optometry of the Université de Montréal (UdeM);
- Reinforced inter-institutional collaboration between HMU and UdeM.

The long-term expected outcomes of this project were:

- Contribute to the elimination of avoidable blindness in Vietnam, following principles of sustainable development and public health, by training of human resources in eye health;
- Added visibility for the World Council of Optometry (WCO) via visibility for the Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO).

ACHIEVEMENT OF THE TRAINING

During my internship in Hanoi, I worked for the Educational Pilot Clinic of Optometry located on 42C Ly Thuong Kiet Street. I was precepting the 4th year students for five half-days per week. I tried to improve their efficiency during a routine eye exam and improve their technical skills. I also tried to give them some advice about the way the clinic was working, especially about hygiene and how to manage the patient examination folders.

At the same time, I created an “open lab” in the preclinic for every student, where 3rd and 4th year students could book a time online to practice their eye exam routine on other students. During this time, a teaching assistant was assisting me in supervising the students to be sure they did everything well. These teaching labs allowed the students to improve their practical skills and clinical judgement on a patient with the help of a preceptor.

Once or twice a week I went to the Geriatric Hospital of Hanoi to observe an ophthalmologist. I learned about the way optometry and ophthalmology is trying to work together in Vietnam. I was able to look at how each profession can help to be more efficient for the eye care of Vietnamese people. I also went to the Medical Center of HMU to see how students are working with the ophthalmologist at that location.

I also assisted in teaching preclinic for the 3rd year students in the Clinical Optometric Procedures course. I aided the two teaching assistants in supervising the students during the laboratories, giving them some advice about how to do some techniques.

During this internship, I also had the chance to attend a “Vietnam Eye-Care Working Group” meeting in Ho Chi Minh city. These one-day meetings are periodic and gather all non-governmental organization (NGOs) working in eye care in Vietnam. It was very interesting to learn about all the organizations in Vietnam and to see how they are all working together to improve the eye care system for patients. It enabled me to meet other members in Vietnam too, such as members of the Alina Hospital and the team at BHVI.

All this experience was very challenging due to the onset of the new virus COVID-19 in mid-January 2020 in China. This situation disturbed many activities in Vietnam such as the school-based screenings with children which was suspended. Due to COVID-19, the people were afraid to go out so we had less patients and many meetings and observations in the hospital had been cancelled.

Finally, my internship ended earlier than expected and I had to stop my work in Vietnam due to the worldwide pandemic.

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