

VICTORIAN HEALTH EDUCATION TEAM – 2010 TRIP TO HO CHI MINH CITY

January 23rd 2010 saw 43 Victorian Health Education Team members begin their 2 week program in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The program included doing working with the nurses, providing lectures and seminars at 8 different hospitals in Ho Chi Minh City.

23 team members of the 43 strong team, left together from Melbourne, while other team members had made their own arrangements to include other travel. On arrival at the Tan Son Nhat airport we were surprised at how quickly we passed through passport control to collect all our baggage (approximately 720kg of it)!



At the airport, waiting for the bus.

Our bus was waiting for us, but we could not find it. A couple of phone calls later and the bus there, luggage and team members being crammed on to it. The traffic was busy. For those who have been before, we noticed an increase in activity, and an increase in cars on the HCMC roads. For those who were there for the first time, it was an eye opener looking out the windows and experiencing the chaos on the roads that would become familiar to them in the next few weeks.

On arrival at our home base, the Le Duy Hotel, we were greeted by a large sign at the hotel door welcoming AVVRG, as well as staff who were happy to see us back. Le Duy hotel has become our home for the 2 week period and the staff are very helpful to us. They were reluctant to accept 'tips' or anything from us, as they acknowledge and are grateful for the work that we are doing in their city.

After getting all team members booked into rooms, it was time for some orientation. Past members and new members alike walked off in the direction of the Ben Thanh Market - Sim cards, and setting

up phones, down to the backpackers to visit dressmakers, and optometrist etc. Getting acquainted with all the places that we frequent when in Vietnam.

We all met then at a favourite restaurant, Lac Thien, for a drink and early dinner. The fact that most of us had been up for almost 24hrs (depending if you slept on the plane or not) was beginning to tell. So after dinner it was back to the hotel and our rooms for sleep, or getting ready for meetings the next day.

Sunday morning some of the team members went to the Reunification Palace. Andrea and Brad led the team, who had a raised colourful blue and green massage donger with koalas, for the team to follow, so they wouldn't get lost!

A Chief Nurses meeting was held at Le Duy with most of the Chief Nurses from the 8 hospitals we would be visiting, in attendance. Our Team leaders joined the meeting and we went over the program. As is expected, changes to the program occurred, but not too many. The lead up to Tet is a busy time of year but the hospitals in the main were all pretty organised this year. As usual though some hospitals had changed some of their own programs completely, still scheduling lectures that we had told them we don't have this year.

After the meeting we met the group for lunch and then some of the new members went on the unofficial Saigon river cruise. A regular feature over the last few years, we have some friends with small boats, who to take groups down the river so that they get a different view of Saigon. An up close and personal view (and smell) of the river is always a highlight for members.

An interpreter meeting back at the hotel late afternoon saw a group of RMIT students join our team. Fiona Terry from RMIT has been working with Althea, our Admin Assistant to set up a process of recruitment. We were pleased with the 20 or so students, some of whom have interpreted for us previously. With Fiona's involvement, our very successful relationship with RMIT is set to continue. Althea with the help of Andrea, our other Admin Assistant, worked hard getting to know the students, allocating them to the various teams and team members. They met them each morning and managed them each day during the program. With the group so big we could not manage without this invaluable assistance.

After the interpreter meeting we had a full team meeting, the first of a few during our stay. For those who had not met each other, it was introductions; for all it was a chance to go over the program and allocations, introduce team leaders etc

After the meeting it was down to the night market for dinner. We have a particular stall there where our 'prawn' man works. He cleared space and put tables together for his 'friends' and made sure we all had what we needed. Perhaps though our group was a little too big as some had to wait a long time for their meal. The Vietnamese are fantastic at trying to accommodate whatever you want, but with 40+ of us it is a big ask.



Dinner at the night market

Monday morning saw the official beginning of our 2 week program. The team broke into various groups and were picked up by the 8 different hospitals. Each day was similar, with various people going to different hospitals, depending on the program. Each hospital had lectures daily and a seminar during the 2 weeks. All seemed to have been well received and the hospitals were enthusiastic. Because our stay this time was during the lead up to Tet, the hospitals were quite busy with meetings and other commitments. This led to some day to day changes to the programs, but as Health Professionals, we are all used to being fairly flexible.



One of the nursing seminars

During the 2 weeks we had several team meetings. These were a chance to disseminate information regarding program changes, get feedback from the group and their impressions from day1. An issues that may have arisen and notification of activities could be communicated at this time. Another major form of communication was our notice board. Set up in the foyer outside the lifts - our programs, notifications of meetings, or trips etc were all posted. If anyone had a find of a good shop, or restaurant etc, it was posted on their too. Sharing the love around. The notice board is a key tool of our success. Also we are not the only ones who like to read it. Other hotel guests seem to like having a read, and see what we are up to!

We were in HCMC for Australia Day, and of course that meant celebration. Kate, Andrea and Althea found a restaurant that would do a Vietnamese BBQ for us. So we booked out this newly opened restaurant and they put on a treat for us. A good time was had by all!

Friday of the first week saw the annual Nurses Conference. This year, as we had more Allied Health professionals in our team, our presentations focused on the Multidisciplinary Team. It was finished off with a Case Study well presented and demonstrated by Doctor – Paul Craven, Nurse – Jen

Benjamin, Occupational Therapists – Penny Griffin and Kellie Emmerson, Speech Pathologist – Jeanette Cowell and Dietician – Anita Wilton. This was well received and promoted much discussion. Thanks to all for your hard work.



Australia Workshop on Nursing sign

Towards the end of our stay meetings with the hospitals' Directors and Chief Nurses were held. Feedback on how they found the program and how it worked for them, in their individual hospitals was sought. We discussed if there were any issues, what went well, etc. Suggestions for next year's topics were canvassed and next year's timing was also confirmed.

Thursday night in the second week saw our annual Party! Always a highlight for both the Aussie Team and our Vietnamese Colleagues. Of course much eating, drinking and of course singing and dancing was done. It was chance for all friends to celebrate friendship and enjoy each other's company in a more relaxed atmosphere.

By the Friday of the second week, the program was at an end. Some final meetings and farewells at various hospitals, and the team members began to head off. Some were going on to further travel; others were staying in HCMC one more night prior to their departure back home. Generally the team members were happy with the program, and how it was received by the hospitals. Many are already preparing for a return next year, and recruiting colleagues to accompany them. And so we start to organise next year's trip straight away.

Of course while we work quite hard, and some days are long, we do have time for some R & R. Various members took the opportunity during time off to go shopping, there by assisting the economy. We like to check out the various eating and drinking establishments, so that we can

recommend them to friends. For example, The Sheraton Wine bar on the 23rd floor has a spectacular view of the city, and happy hour between 4.30 and 6.30pm.



Views of the city

Some trips were taken to see other parts of Vietnam as well. Several team members visited the Mekong Delta which is always interesting. Probably the most interesting for one team member who was bitten by a dog and ended up needing to undergo a course of Rabies injections! The middle weekend is also a time of R & R. People ventured to places further afield such as Danang, Mui Ne and Vung Tao. Those who remained in HCMC took the opportunity to rest and were also guests of Tu Du hospital on a trip to the Mekong Delta.

So at the end of our 2 weeks in Vietnam a good time, and as successful trip was had by all.

Thanks to all our team members for your hard work and commitment.

Tricia Ansell, President, Vic Health Education Team.