

VIETNAM HAND SURGERY TRAINING PROGRAM

In the mid 1990s the population of Vietnam was 78 million. There were no hand units nor specialist hand surgeons in the country. This program was started by The Rotary Club of Mosman and Associate Professor W. Bruce Conolly to help address those issues.

Our team initially visited hospitals in Hanoi, Hue and Ho Chi Minh City, but soon focussed our efforts on Hue, where our courses were the most productive, thanks largely to Orthopaedic Department Director, Dr Pham Dang Nhat, his staff at Hue Central Hospital, and the encouragement of their extremely supportive hospital administration. As we soon learned, this is the key to successful outreach work. An engaged, organised host institution.

Over 25 years, we have completed 26 clinical visits and run 16 courses , plus several webinars during Covid. Our core team has included hand surgeons Professor Jagdeep Nanchahal (University of Oxford) and Richard Lawson, Damian Ryan and Peter Scougall (Sydney). At various times we have been joined by a number of other Australian surgeons, including Tony Beard, Jennifer Green, Graham Gumley, Scott Harbison, Tim Heath, Ian Hargreaves, Damian Ireland, Ian Isaacs, Prof. Wayne Morrison, Sean Nicklin and Tim Peltz. Hand Therapist Rosemary Prosser has been involved since the beginning, assisted by Kylie Flynn, Cathy Merry, Clancy Tisdell and Daniel Vuovic. For several visits we added knee (Quang Dao) and shoulder programs (David Lieu, Wade Harper and Danny Biggs).

In addition to Mosman Rotary, the program has been supported by the Australian Hand Surgery Society, Orthopaedic Outreach and St Luke's Hospital, Sydney. Thanks to their generosity, we have donated new, high quality surgical equipment to course participants. During our visit in 2018, a surgeon from Da Nang told us he had used the instrument set we gave him every week for 10 years. Thanks also to Medartis, Synthes, Medtronic Australia and Johnson and Johnson for generously donating equipment and technical support.

Each of our courses has been attended by an average of 60 to 80 surgeons from across the country. We have run tendon, fracture fixation and microsurgery workshops, treated hundreds of patients and taught Vietnamese Orthopaedic and Plastic Surgeons a range of hand surgery techniques.

With our help, the first Vietnamese Hand Unit was opened at Hue Central Hospital in 2002. Starting with 10 beds, 3 surgeons and 389 hand surgery procedures that year, the unit grew to 50 beds, 12 surgeons and 1600 hand surgery procedures in 2018. Hue Central Hospital hand surgeons performed 122 complex microsurgical hand reconstructions between 2018 and 2022.

It is difficult to assess the success of a program like this. Vietnamese health services would have changed dramatically over the 25 years we have been visiting, regardless of our involvement. We have adapted to their evolving training needs. They remain as enthusiastic about our input as they ever were. It has been a pleasure to witness and contribute to their hand surgery journey. We are planning another visit in October this year, our first face to face contribution since Covid.

Peter Scougall, 20/5/23