

# The Volunteer Connection

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An Evolving Method of Training  
HVO Wyss Scholars | Nursing Anesthesia in Laos



*"It's important to be aware, from a health care perspective, that you live in a global world. Be aware of inequalities and think about how you, as an individual, can help solve those inequalities. This is an experience I would recommend to any health care provider."*

*- Carlota Clemente de la Torre, MSc*



**Health Volunteers Overseas**  
*Transforming Lives Through Education*

## Letter from the Executive Director

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Dear friends,

In an era where we are all accustomed to instant gratification—where smartphones, apps, streaming services, and overnight deliveries give us everything at our fingertips—it's easy to forget that some things still require time, effort, and dedication.

Two years ago, a team of volunteers partnered with colleagues in Hue, Vietnam, to organize the country's first-ever conference on neonatal dermatology. The conference attracted 1,200 healthcare professionals who took their newfound knowledge back to their respective institutions. However, the true impact of this event is only now becoming evident, two years later.

Dr. Mai Ba Hoang Anh, HVO's on-site coordinator for the dermatology project in Hue, recently shared how this initial conference sparked interest nationwide. It generated further conferences and raised awareness about neonatal dermatology, a sub-specialty that had previously received little attention. As awareness grows, so too does the possibility for better and more systematic training in this vital area of healthcare. Real change is unfolding—and more is on the horizon.

In this newsletter, you will read about two volunteers who, after their initial visits, decided to set up ongoing virtual training with colleagues in Vietnam and Cambodia. They recognized that achieving their goals for change would take more than their short assignment. While progress may seem slow, their continued collaboration is laying the groundwork for systemic improvements that have the potential to transform healthcare for generations.

At HVO, we believe that investing in education is not a quick fix—it's a lasting one. And it's an investment that we know is worth the time.

Sincerely,

*April*

April Pinner, MSPH, RD  
Executive Director

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## From Virtual to In-Person: Health Volunteers Overseas' Evolving Model for Global Health Impact

Since the COVID-19 shutdowns, Health Volunteers Overseas has found a productive balance in a new model of education that blends in-person and online training suited to the needs of sites and volunteers. Ms. Winnie Cheng, BSc, ACPR and Ms. Carlota Clemente de la Torre, MSc and their partners found the blend effective this year as they worked on our oncology and hematology projects in Vietnam and Cambodia.

Ms. Cheng, an oncology pharmacist, has been working with the pharmacy team at the National Cancer Hospital (K Hospital) in Hanoi, Vietnam. The four clinical pharmacists and the department head from the affiliated university met with Ms. Cheng online for several months leading up to her visit, getting to know each other, discussing primary needs, engaging in case discussions, and planning her time on site.



Photo courtesy of Winnie Cheng

During her two weeks at K Hospital, Ms. Cheng focused on training pharmacists on a comprehensive, clinical approach to practice. “There is no residency training program to prepare pharmacists for clinical practice,” Ms. Cheng explained. “Their master’s program is research focused.” Because of this, pharmacists have more knowledge than practical experience. “We worked through problems together, and we talked about developing that process so they feel more comfortable on their own. I think it’s important to have this kind of training because every patient is different, but, when you have this process, it helps you make recommendations.”

In addition to working with the pharmacists, Ms. Cheng also presented a lecture to the entire oncology team. In turn, the team showed her how they run their clinic and shared numerous cases for discussion. “It was a great experience, seeing what it’s like there and what barriers they face,” said Ms. Cheng. “There are only four pharmacists caring for 500 patients a day.” She pointed out that as much as she is a volunteer, her busy Vietnamese colleagues were also volunteering their time to learn.

They continue to volunteer their time teaching and learning, even though Ms. Cheng has returned home. They try to meet every month to discuss unique cases and share lectures. When they are unable to meet, the pharmacists email Ms. Cheng for advice. While progress can feel slow at times, Ms. Cheng is not deterred. “I think it will take more time,” she says. “Sometimes progress can be slow. A lot of the cases we’ve gone through with the oncologists, and I can tell they appreciated my opinions. I can also tell this is showing them what pharmacists are capable of.”

In addition to the impact she sees her work having on her partners, she also sees the impact her time as a volunteer has had on her. “I do some teaching here, and I think it has really helped me continue to develop those teaching skills but for a different audience, a more varied audience. Here, I mostly teach residents and small groups. But there, I connected with an entire multi-disciplinary team, and we worked together.” She suggests prospective volunteers “go with an open mind, a curious mind,” and reminds

*Continued on page 4*

## Feature Story

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Photo courtesy of Winnie Cheng

others to be conscious of the privileges they have when practicing in an environment with access to more resources.

Thinking about the importance of the combination of in-person and virtual connections, Ms. Cheng reflects, “If I hadn’t gone on site, I can imagine how much slower progress would have been. Going there was a lot about building connections. It was helpful to me to understand

what the role of a pharmacist there is and what type of learning it was appropriate for us to focus on.” Leading up to the visit with virtual meetings, though, allowed Ms. Cheng and colleagues to maximize her in-person time through planning, and following up has allowed them to continue making progress beyond what they were able to accomplish in a two-week visit.

Ms. Cheng is also involved with HVO’s palliative care project in Thimphu, Bhutan, and she hopes to continue making in-person visits to project sites to enhance their work together.

Ms. Carlota Clemente de la Torre, a nurse who specializes in hematology and oncology, has been having a similar experience with HVO’s hematology project in Cambodia at Calmette Hospital in Phnom Penh. She and the project directors determined that the nurses could benefit from learning from Ms. Clemente how nurses in the United Kingdom (where she lives and practices) experience specialized training and clinical practice in hematology and oncology. They began by setting up a day of online training. “I explained the unique training you need before you give chemotherapy and the educational framework necessary,” she says. “You need education before you give chemo and you need teaching and training to become competent.” The day showed officials at Calmette that they need to provide their nurses with training for them to give chemotherapy safely to patients.

Ms. Clemente spent a productive year meeting online with Cambodian nurses before visiting in person. Inspired by the relationship she was building with the nurses at Calmette, the project director suggested she also reach out to nurses at Angkor Hospital for Children (AHC) in Siem Reap, Cambodia. One of these nurses received a scholarship to visit the UK where she was able to meet with Ms. Clemente.

“It’s been more than just teaching,” Ms. Clemente says of her online activities. “You start building the relationship so that you’re not just a stranger going to their hospital. You’ve already been discussing issues and planning the visit. It was incredibly useful to do the teaching online first, determine what the issues are, and find out how we can work together.” When she finally arrived in Phnom Penh in 2024, she and her colleagues were ready to get to work. Their time focused on safe handling of toxic medications, administration of anti-cancer therapies, and PPE. The first four days of the visit gave Ms. Clemente an idea of how much the nurses were being exposed to chemotherapy drugs. After this initial assessment, she worked with doctors and the head of the nurses to organize training on safe handling, chemotherapy administration, and line care. A particularly important outcome of their work together was the development of protocols for safe handling of chemotherapy that they can use in daily practice.



## Feature Story

Ms. Clemente may have returned to the UK, but she does not consider her work done. “It’s difficult to achieve things in two weeks,” she says. “Change is progressive. Keeping up the relationships online can help you see how things are progressing and evolving. Two weeks is too short to see outcomes happening, but it gave us an idea of how we can improve.” One of the ways she and the nursing teams at Calmette and AHC are working towards improvement is by establishing a journal club. Ms. Clemente sees it as a safe space for nurses to have time once a month to discuss oncology topics.

While she is not sure when exactly she can return to Cambodia herself, Ms. Clemente is prepared to talk to future volunteers so they can continue the work smoothly. She has personally found the work very rewarding: “For me, it was incredible. I learned a lot. It’s about adapting your knowledge and respecting another culture, taking into account the resources they have and how you can do your best with what you have. It’s important to be aware, from a health care perspective, that you live in a global world. Be aware of inequalities and think about how you, as an individual, can help solve those inequalities. This is an experience I would recommend to any health care provider.”



Photo courtesy of Carlota Clemente de la Torre

One of the things that makes HVO special is our community and their desire and willingness to build lasting relationships. These relationships are what drive long-term change. Here are a few thoughts from colleagues Ms. Cheng and Ms. Clemente developed relationships with over the course of their work with HVO:

*I am the pediatric oncology nursing team leader at Angkor Hospital for Children. Working with Carlota is really beneficial. Thanks to her suggestions, I can identify and find areas to grow and look for the gaps in our practice. Her feedback and recommendations push me to improve. She helps conduct workshops and staff training in our department. She guides me to make important observations in chemo administration in our daily work. She has helped us make changes to better our practice and emphasizes and shares how to use tools effectively. She guided me on keeping up to date and using evidence-based clinical practice and using SOPs to become more effective. The most important impacts so far have been improved patient outcomes and increased confidence and competency of nursing professionals in clinical practice.*

*I would absolutely like to continue working with HVO volunteers to push me to keep up life-long learning and stay up to date and to continue improving the quality of our care. I want to continue our global collaboration and expand our network of oncology nurses. I would like to have the opportunity to advance my career and to be supportive of others. On behalf of myself, my vice nursing director, and the Cambodian nursing professionals, I would like to express my deep feelings of gratitude and say thank you to the donors and volunteers of HVO for the valuable things you share with and contribute to Cambodia, especially to Angkor Hospital for Children.*

*Phanoeurn Heng*  
Phanoeurn Heng

*Continued on page 6*

## Feature Story

*First, I would like to thank HVO, Ms. Cheng, and you for supporting clinical pharmacist competency at Vietnam National Cancer Hospital (K Hospital). Then, I would like to provide some information about myself. I am a lecturer at Hanoi University of Pharmacy. I am working with pharmacy departments of oncology-specialized hospitals to help develop clinical pharmacy activities, including K Hospital. Therefore, I joined almost all of Ms. Cheng's activities with K Hospital.*

*Ms. Cheng's visit to K Hospital and virtual discussions were very helpful for me, the pharmacists, and the physicians of K Hospital. She demonstrated her expertise when joining ward rounds and helped to answer physicians' inquiries about medication use. In addition, she delivered presentations about anticancer medications to pharmacists and physicians. I feel that these activities, on one hand, have made physicians more open to collaborating with pharmacists when dealing with medication use issues and more trusting in pharmacists. On the other hand, the pharmacists and I felt more confident about our activities because we were doing similar things to what pharmacists do in a real-world setting, not just like what is described in the literature. In the virtual discussions, we talked about the difficult cases we encountered and listened to her suggestions about solutions and, more importantly, the way to approach those cases. In this way, we have learned a lot from her, and I feel that this method is very efficient for the pharmacists in K hospital.*

*As I also work with Hanoi Oncology Hospital, another major site for cancer treatment in the North of Vietnam, I hope I can continue to collaborate with HVO and Ms. Cheng to improve clinical pharmacist competency and develop clinical pharmacy activities in this hospital. If we can do well in these leading hospitals, it could benefit other provincial oncology hospitals in Vietnam.*

*Thank you very much again for your help.*

*Best regards,*

*Nguyen Thi Hong Hanh*

Nguyen Thi Hong Hanh





## News and Events

### Dr. Marie O'Toole Receives Lillian Wald Humanitarian Award



Photo courtesy of Marie O'Toole

The National League for Nursing has awarded Dr. Marie O'Toole their Lillian Wald Humanitarian Award for her dedication to nursing education. Her work pursuing sustainable initiatives and her encouragement of others to get involved in humanitarian projects have led her to stand out among her peers.

Dr. O'Toole has been volunteering with HVO since the early 1990s and has completed fourteen assignments with the nursing project in Vietnam. She served on the nursing steering committee for eight years, with four of those years as the committee's first chair. She received the HVO President's Call to Service Award in 2006 for her commitment to our mission. She says, "HVO set me on the path of knowing the importance of sustainability for any initiative, and for this (and many other lessons) I am eternally grateful."

Dr. O'Toole is the Senior Associate Dean at the Rutgers School of Nursing – Camden.

### A Nursing Anesthesia Journey

Dr. Richard Henker has been visiting Lao Friends Hospital for Children (LFHC) since 2015, often accompanied by nurse anesthesia students from the University of Pittsburgh. During his trip this summer, he collaborated with local partners to conduct a successful workshop focused on regional anesthesia for eleven Lao anesthesiology residents. Following this workshop, Kuelee Lao, a nurse anesthetist at LFHC and an HVO Warfield Scholar, traveled with Dr. Henker to the AANA conference in San Diego to present his research poster. They then proceeded to the University of Pittsburgh, where Kuelee had the opportunity to observe anesthesia practice in the U.S.



Photos courtesy of Rick Henker



For the full story, scan the QR code to watch a video or visit [www.hvoua.org](http://www.hvoua.org)



# Wyss Scholars

The Wyss Scholarship for Future Leaders in Global Health, made possible by a generous donation from Mr. Hansjörg Wyss, allows HVO to support the professional development of local health care providers at HVO project sites.



Mr. Wyss's generosity has been nothing short of life changing. I was able to participate in 14th IFSSH and 11th IFSHT Triennial Congress in 2019, an experience that has enriched my understanding of and practice in the emerging science of hand surgery and hand therapy. Experts from around the globe shared insights, best practices, and cutting-edge research, fostering collaboration and enhancing patient care in hand surgery and therapy. What made this lesson invaluable was its practical applicability and its ability to reshape my approach to hand therapy. Since attending, I have actively

integrated the knowledge and skills acquired into all my endeavors. I have been actively involved in teaching young therapists back home. The Wyss Scholarship has not only enriched my own professional development but also had a positive impact on the individuals I interact with.

- Gangtey Yoedzer CPT, BPT, MHSM | Jigme Dorji Wangchuk National Referral Hospital, Bhutan

I applied to participate in the Joint 3rd Primer in Pediatric Nephrology for Asia and 3rd IPNA/AsPNA Junior Masterclass organized by the National University Hospital of Singapore through the Wyss Scholarship when I was in my third year of residency. I am ever grateful to have received this golden opportunity to attend an enriching conference.

It was a dream come true for me; I met some of the great authors whose journals I have been using as a reference for my own studies. I even had an opportunity to show my research for their opinions and suggestions, of which they were the pioneers. They shared their ideas with me and encouraged me to do further studies in pediatric nephrology in Bhutan.



The journey from Bhutan to Singapore and back was a memorable one which I will cherish my entire life. The knowledge and experience I have gained from this conference was immense, and it not only benefitted me but also my colleagues. I will forever be indebted to your kindness and generosity.

- Sonam S., MD | Jigme Dorji Wangchuk Referral Hospital, Bhutan

I got the Wyss scholarship in 2015 to study dermatopathology at Columbia University. At that time, we didn't have dermatologists and didn't do many biopsies, which are very important to give accurate diagnoses. Thanks to the scholarship, I could learn fundamental knowledge in dermatopathology so that we could feel more comfortable in doing biopsies. Moreover, it helped me realize what I knew and what I didn't know and when to call out for help. Thanks to my very fundamental knowledge of dermatopathology, I have joined weekly video conferences with dermatopathologists in the U.S. and other dermatologists all over my country to discuss difficult cases. This is a great opportunity to help me enhance my confidence and develop my career as well as my community.

-Thanh Phuong Nguyen, MD | Hue University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Vietnam





# Wyss Scholars

Sixty providers from ten countries have had the opportunity to take advantage of educational opportunities outside their own countries. Here are just a few reflections that have been shared with us.

It was a great honour to be a recipient of the Wyss Scholarship in 2018. The opportunity to attend the Global Spine Congress in Canada convinced me of my choice to pursue orthopaedic surgery. I met several leading surgeons whose work inspired me to continue with specialist surgical training. The impact of clinical research and evidence-based medicine was illustrated in high quality studies presented at the Congress with a focus on improved patient outcomes. The experience encouraged me to look beyond service delivery as the only role of a surgeon in a low-income country and to focus on patient-centered care to improve outcomes. It also renewed my interest in skills transfer to ensure long-term continuity of quality patient-based surgical care. After completion of my specialist training in Cape Town, I intend to return to Tanzania to contribute towards the growth of quality and sustainable orthopaedic surgical care.

The Wyss Scholarship has played a valuable role in shaping my current career path.

*- Mubashir Jusabani, MD | Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Centre, Tanzania*

The Wyss Scholarship enabled me to attend the American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology meeting in Miami along with the two-week observership program at the University of Florida. The experience has profoundly enriched my knowledge and skills in the field of oral pathology.

One of the most valuable lessons I learned from the conference was the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration. I not only broadened my understanding of the field but also reinforced my commitment to collaborative practice.

During my observership program, I could see thousands of slides of rare cases that I had never seen before. I have been able to apply this knowledge and insight to my clinical practice. The information and techniques I learned have significantly enhanced my ability to diagnose cases with complex oral pathologies, ultimately improving patient care.

I have seized every opportunity to share the knowledge I acquired with my colleagues and students. In this way, I am helping to inspire the next generation of oral pathology professionals and contribute to the advancement of the field.

Through this scholarship, I have had the privilege of connecting with esteemed professionals and mentors who have offered guidance and support, further fueling my passion for oral pathology and propelling my career forward. Your support has not only transformed my educational experience but has also empowered me to make a meaningful difference in the lives of patients and the advancement of oral pathology.

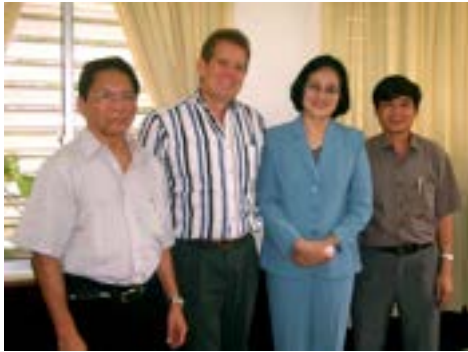
*- Pratibha Poudel, MD | University School of Medical Sciences, Nepal*



## In Memorium

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### Larry Wolfe



HVO was saddened to hear that former staff member Larry S. Wolfe passed away in the Philippines on April 21, 2024 at the age of 72. Larry served as project director for HVO's USAID-funded rehabilitation project in Vietnam from 1998 – 2006. Based in Hanoi, he was instrumental in steering the project through various stages, setting up the Disability Forum, and, ultimately, transitioning it into a local NGO called IDEA (Inclusive Development Action). His quiet, calm demeanor in the newly opened Vietnam proved to be an extremely effective management style in negotiating between the Vietnamese and

US government representatives.

Larry served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Malaysia. He was an early proponent of keeping files, books, and music on his computer. He was an avid swimmer and was happiest when he was at the beach.

He received his master's degree from the Thunderbird School of Global Management and was a firm believer in the power of international development. Not only did he devote his career to such work, he was also a committed, generous donor to HVO.

HVO is grateful for the opportunity to have known and worked closely with Larry. He will be dearly remembered for his dedication, his quiet leadership, and his strong presence.

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### Richard Kemme, MD



Dr. Richard Joseph Kemme passed away earlier this year at the age of 94. Dr. Kemme has been part of the HVO community since 1981, when we were still Orthopaedics Overseas. During his many decades of dedication to advancing global health, Dr. Kemme served as the director of the orthopaedic project in Malawi for many years, traveling there frequently to teach and train colleagues and strengthen the project. HVO recognized him for his extraordinary service with the HVO Volunteer of the Year award in 1999 and the President's Call to Service award in 2006.

Dr. Kemme received degrees from Regis University and the St. Louis University School of Medicine. He completed his residency in orthopaedic surgery at St. Louis University before joining the Greely Medical Clinic in Colorado as their first specialist in orthopaedic surgery.



## Special Thanks

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A planned gift ensures that HVO will be able to continue to make important educational strides in the improvement of health care in resource-scarce countries.

When you write or review your will, please consider leaving HVO a charitable bequest as an investment in HVO's future. To discuss making a bequest in your will or other charitable aspects of your estate planning, please contact Danielle Stonehirsch at [d.stonehirsch@hvousa.org](mailto:d.stonehirsch@hvousa.org).

If you have already made a charitable bequest, please let us know. We would like the opportunity to express our gratitude and will honor all requests to remain anonymous.

Thank you to the following people who have made this commitment:

Anonymous (7)  
Charles & Sandy Blitzer  
Richard Coughlin, MD, MSc  
Jay Cox, MD  
Nancy Cox  
Kim Dunleavy, PhD, PT,  
OCS  
Denise & Dennis English  
Germaine Fritz, DO  
Dr. & Mrs. David Frost

Leslie Glickman, PT, PhD,  
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Elaine Goodall, PT, Med  
Linda & John James  
Nancy Kelly & Michael Hagan  
Drs. Elizabeth & Gopal  
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**Health Volunteers Overseas** is dedicated to improving the availability and quality of health care through the education, training and professional development of the health workforce in resource-scarce countries. HVO designs and implements clinical training and education programs in child health, primary care, trauma and rehabilitation, essential surgical care, oral health, blood disorders and cancer, infectious disease, wound management, and nursing education.

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