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learn...
explore!



Catholic University of America graduate spends one month in Vietnam gaining a different view on medicine

“Volunteering means discovering, introducing and understanding.”

This definition fits perfectly with the volunteering experience of the young graduate Timmy Le (22). Having always wanted to experience volunteering, Timmy signed up with Projects Abroad and traveled to Vietnam where he participated in their Medical Project. His placement was at the paediatric cerebral palsy department at The National Acupuncture Hospital where he had the opportunity to learn about interesting Eastern medicine and treatment methods.

A typical day at the hospital started at 7:45am. As soon as he put on his white coat, Timmy began his work, which would range from removing acupuncture needles from patients, placing the electrodes for electronic acupuncture or drawing medication up for patients. Later during the day, he also gave advice to the patients' parents on how to stretch their children's muscles, so that the muscle fibres would not be spastic.

Having grown up with cerebral palsy himself, Timmy was able to understand what the paediatric patients and their parents were going through. One of

the biggest motivations and sources of delight for Timmy was his patients, “I absolutely loved seeing my patients every day and the excitement on their faces when they saw me. The hospital environment is very professional and at the same time, it feels like everyone is family because everyone wants to help each other out when their children are receiving treatment, which is a characteristic of the Vietnamese culture of communistic rather than individualistic that we have in Western culture.”

Since acupuncture is a foreign healing practice to Western people and the complex concept has such a long history, Timmy had to put a lot of effort into communicating with and learning from the local doctors and observing and understanding the way acupuncture works. During his one month, by always staying serious but friendly, diligent and open-minded, Timmy's performance was highly appreciated. “Timmy was very hardworking and serious. We love the way he quickly learnt and absorbed the new things. Also Timmy was always helpful and friendly to the patients and their parents; they really liked Timmy,” said Timmy's supervisor.

“My work experience in Vietnam will be of great value for me as a physician because the United States is very diverse and you have to be able to work with everyone regardless of cultural differences. Also, being culturally competent adds value to you as a physician because it allows you to understand your patients better and therefore you can treat them better.”

In addition, this voluntary time brought Timmy another important benefit: “I have gained a new perspective on medicine because when I think of medicine, I think of Western medicine, but never Eastern medicine. This placement in Hanoi has broadened my worldview and developed me to be more open-minded about how different cultures view medicine.”

