

Tropical Medicine Course Report

I attended the Asian Clinical Tropical Medicine course in Thailand from June 30th to July 10th 2014. This course, run by the University of Ottawa, George Regents University of Georgia, and Mahidol University, was delivered mostly at the Faculty of Tropical Medicine on the Mahidol campus in Bangkok. Instructors are drawn from the local and visiting Faculty staff. Dr. Anne McCarthy, an Infectious Disease Consultant in Ottawa with strong Irish links, was a particularly impressive teacher but there was also some excellent teaching from the Thai experts. The participants were mostly either Infectious Disease Fellows in the USA and Canada, or travel medicine physicians and nurses working in various aspects of travel health worldwide. A particular strength of the course was the opportunity it provided to discuss clinical cases in tropical medicine. No time was wasted in order to achieve the ambitious CEM credits offered by the course, and that meant that we even had case presentations on the bus to and from the university daily! The days were long as we set out from the hotel at 8am and rarely returned back before 6pm. Bangkok traffic is sluggish at the best of times but always an experience!

On day 1, we had lectures on diagnosis and management of malaria, both severe and uncomplicated. We were treated to an acupuncture demonstration at a local hospital, devoted to this and other complementary therapies. One member of our group, a good-humoured Resident from the US, submitted consensually to a cupping procedure on his back and sported multiple “therapeutic” ecchymoses for the rest of the course! This was followed by malaria case presentations at the bedside in the adjacent teaching hospital and a practical laboratory session devoted to diagnosis of malaria and other protozoa, including toxoplasmosis, cryptosporidiosis, amoebiasis, and giardiasis.

On day two, we had a very inspirational lecture from Dr. Ted Kuhn from the Georgia faculty. Dr. Kuhn has spent many years working in the tropics and gave a true global perspective on disease. He also gave a session on using ultrasound scanning effectively in resource poor settings. Local faculty educated us on melioidosis (reasonably common in north-west Thailand and a definite travel health risk), gnathostomiasis, and travel recommendations for visitors to Thailand. The latter was given by Dr. Watcharapong Piyaphanee from the Thai Society of Travel Medicine, who is very prominent in the travel

medicine community in Asia and who has succeeded in gaining specialty recognition for travel medicine in his country. We had further laboratory sessions where we prepared smears and made microscopic diagnoses of various types of malaria and helminthic infections.

Day 3 was a lot of fun as we travelled by bus to the Thai Red Cross facility for an excellent session on rabies and venomous snakes, including a live demonstration of milking snake venom to produce anti-venom. I learned that I have a lot to learn about snakes! The day ended with case presentations and ward rounds at the Queen Sirikit National Institute of Child Health which has particular expertise in the management of Dengue infection.

Our weekend was spent in Ratchaburi province near the Thai-Myanmar border where we witnessed the work of the local malaria research station and visited a local school-based malaria education project. Didactic lectures were delivered on the Thai healthcare system and travellers' malaria. Each participant had to give a 15 minute slide presentation on a relevant topic of their choosing. I spoke about travelling to altitude with pre-existing medical conditions. This was based on my invited lecture on behalf of TMSI at the Triennial Conference at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow in June. I learned a lot from listening to the other participants, many of whom had worked in the tropics in some very challenging situations. One lady was an Epidemiologist with the CDC in the USA and provided interesting insights into their role. Before we left Ratchaburi we visited a community primary health care station. The less I say about the group karaoke session the night before, the better!

We had only one day off on the first Sunday, so I visited Bangkok Zoo and explored the city. To say that it is buzzing with life and energetic activity would be an understatement. The overwhelming kindness and warm nature of the Thai people will stay with me forever.

Day 7 focused on tropical infections in immunosuppressed hosts and we had teaching at the Siriraj Hospital and the Bamrajnaradura Institute in Bangkok, where we met patients with HIV-AIDS and discussed the management of opportunistic infections. Day 8 included clinical case discussions and a lecture on helminthiasis, as well we laboratory

sessions which focused on the diagnosis of melioidosis, leptospirosis, cryptococcal infection, and Dengue.

Our penultimate day involved a visit to an anonymous HIV clinic at the Thai Red Cross in Bangkok, followed by ward rounds at a local hospital and a useful lecture on Chikungunya infection. We all had to 'undergo' a traditional Thai massage at a health clinic having been educated first on its therapeutic role in the Thai healthcare system. Some of my closest friends and I chose the foot reflexology option and it was so relaxing that we nearly missed the bus back to the hotel! Our final night was spent at the famous Siam Niramit complex where we enjoyed a lovely meal and live show, and we all received our Certificates of Completion. Day 10 was fascinating as we visited the Bangkok Metropolitan Administrative Health Center and met a wonderful elderly physician, Prof. Pongdej Wichainprasat (Figure 1), who still runs a very successful Tuberculosis DOTS Control programme while in his 80s. The course ended with a very comprehensive lecture on leprosy from a local expert.

Overall, I would strongly recommend this excellent course in tropical medicine. You will learn a lot and meet some fascinating people. I have kept in touch with several of them and we plan a reunion at CISTM in Canada in 2015, or NECTM in London in 2016. If you would like further information about the course, please visit <http://www.med.uottawa.ca/globalhealth/eng/actmc.html>.



Fig. 1 Prof. Pongdej Wichainprasat, an inspirational physician, lecturing on TB.

Dr. Gerard Flaherty