

Vietnam Emergency Medicine Symposium

Joseph Lex, MD FACEP FAAEM

I was one of more than 60 volunteer faculty, physicians and nurses from the U.S., Canada, Australia, Thailand and The Netherlands, that attended a Symposium in Hue, Vietnam, from March 22-26, 2010. Our purpose was simple – to kick-start the specialty of emergency medicine (EM) in Vietnam by assembling a critical mass of people who were movers and shakers in the specialty, many of whom had already made their contributions to international emergency medicine in various ways.

It all started for me when I gave rounds at SUNY Buffalo in April 2009. After a daylong Amtrak trek from Philadelphia, I gave several talks the next morning, and then spent the afternoon exploring the local sites associated with the assassination of William McKinley. That evening at dinner, I sat across from an EM faculty member named Sam Cloud, MD, who mentioned that he had just returned from a medical mission in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, where hopes were high that the specialty of emergency medicine would soon be recognized by the Minister of Health.

Sam is part of a group called Good Samaritans Medical & Dental Ministry, a non-government organization (NGO) which had been doing medical mission work in Vietnam for nearly a decade. They felt the time was ripe for the specialty to blossom and mature, but needed help with contacts. Since serving as a medic in Vietnam with the U.S. Army, I have had a special place in my heart for the land and its people, so I offered my assistance of both prior experience in the international arena and in helping put together AAEM Scientific Assemblies over the past decade. Within a few days, I had received an invitation from the mission's director. Vien Doan, DO, a family medicine specialist from southern California, had taken it as his personal mission to establish EM in Vietnam. He had linked up with Carter Hill, MD, an emergency physician in Seattle and the American College of Emergency Physicians' (ACEP) ambassador to Vietnam. Dr. Doan asked me if I could get a handful of faculty to teach some basic emergency medicine approaches to complaints frequently seen in the Vietnam hospitals – chest pain, shortness of breath, seizures, head trauma, long bone trauma, chest trauma, etc. I put out the word through various listservs and contacts and soon had a handful of eager instructors willing to teach in Vietnam on their own dime. We would have 20 hours of didactic talks from nearly 20 experts in emergency medicine.

Now it got even more interesting. "Joe, it looks like there may be as many as 200 people attending the meeting. We need some afternoon workshops. People want to learn ultrasound skills, intubation skills, other resuscitation skills." Again, I sought volunteers, and again, the response was incredibly strong and gratifying. We now had workshops on all of the above, plus orthopedic procedures and pediatric resuscitation. Companies were extraordinarily open to donating ultrasound machines, simulators, airway and central

line devices. And yet even more EM docs were willing to come to teach these skills; before long, the number of volunteer faculty had blossomed to more than 40.

And then in late 2009, the Minister of Health announced that emergency medicine was approved as a specialty, and our group was asked to help Hue College of Medicine and Pharmacy establish the first residency training program and convince the nine other medical schools (and three other major teaching hospitals) that EM would be for the benefit of all concerned. "Joe, we need a Deans' Conference...a session where the deans of all these schools can be made to see the necessity and urgency of emergency medicine training." So I made a few more contacts, and yet even more people volunteered to come. Kris Arnold, MD, leader of ACEP's International Ambassador Program, volunteered to develop the deans' conference. Tammi Thomas, MD, soon joined him. I knew that combined, these

two had as much experience in international emergency medicine as any other ten people. Howard Blumstein, MD FAAEM, then AAEM vice president (now president), eagerly emailed me his acceptance. Bob Suter, DO, past president of both ACEP and IFEM (International Federation for Emergency Medicine) was about to disembark for active duty with the U.S. Army in Iraq, but said he would be there. Terry Mulligan, DO, and chair of ACEP's International Committee was more than willing to come share his experience in helping establish EM in The Netherlands.

The next request wasn't as tricky as anticipated: "Joe,

we need a textbook of emergency medicine for translation into Vietnamese." Peter Cameron, MBBS MD FACEM, of Melbourne, Australia, then vice president (and now president) of IFEM, had just submitted galleys for the 3rd edition of his *Textbook of Emergency Medicine* to his publisher and unhesitatingly said, "Of course you can use my book." Churchill Livingstone had no qualms about allowing a local translation, so then we had our textbook. Peter also gladly volunteered to come and bring several faculty from Monash University with him.

Then, in November, I was attending the Emergency Medicine in the Developing World Conference in Cape Town, South Africa, when I got another missive from Dr. Doan. "Joe, the nurses want a conference too. Can you help?" By coincidence, Bob Suter was attending this meeting with his wife Michelle Suter, RN, a nurse educator at Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas, Texas. After surreptitiously asking if she would be accompanying Bob to Vietnam (she said yes), I tagged her with the additional responsibility of assembling a nursing conference – she took it and ran with it, and soon our volunteer faculty list had swelled to more than 60.

Then, the prehospital group wanted to get involved, and yet another meeting was assembled for their edification.



Left to right: James Ramseier, MD (Good Samaritan Medical-Dental Ministry, Las Vegas, NV); Vien Doan, DO (medical director, Good Samaritan Medical-Dental Ministry, Riverside, California); Kris Arnold, MD (chair, ACEP Ambassador Program, Boston, MA); Howard Blumstein, MD FAAEM (president AAEM, Winston-Salem, NC); Terry Mulligan, DO (chair, ACEP Section for International Emergency Medicine, Utrecht, Netherlands); Joe Lex, MD FAAEM (symposium chair, Philadelphia, PA); Bob Suter, DO (past president, American College of Emergency Physicians; past president, International Federation for Emergency Medicine; Dallas, Texas).

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So, what started as a symposium to teach practicing emergency physicians about emergency medicine had now enlarged to four separate meetings: a deans' conference to help with the nuts and bolts of establishing emergency medicine training programs, a physicians' meeting, a nurses' meeting, and a meeting of prehospital specialists.

Finally, we sought educational materials for the medical school libraries and attendees, and the response was overwhelming. Rick Nunez, MD FAAEM, of EMedHome.com (<http://www.emedhome.com/>), graciously granted a free subscription to his website for every attendee. After establishing that each medical school and teaching hospital in the country has rudimentary but adequate electronic tools, I started recruiting material. Mel Herbert, MD FAAEM, gave free access to Emergency Medicine Reviews and Perspectives (EMRAP) to each site; Diku Mandavia, MD, of CMEDownload.com (<http://cmedownload.com>), gave free access to his site; Rick Bukata, MD, gave free access to Emergency Medical Abstracts; Mr. Bob Sweeney, CEO of Challenger, Inc., gave free subscriptions for all Challenger, Inc., programs; and Mr. Lon Osmond of Audio-Digest Emergency Medicine contributed three years of back issues to each site. My own site, Free Emergency Medicine Talks (<http://www.freeemergencytalks.net/>), is available to anyone who wants to access and download mp3s of talks from around the world. Within a few days, we had arranged access to thousands of hours of material, worth tens of thousands of dollars, and no one hesitated in the least.

On Monday morning, March 22, 2010, it all came together: Peter Cameron, MBBS MD FACEM, IFEM president-elect, gave opening remarks about the importance and necessity of emergency medicine as a global specialty; Howard Blumstein, MD FAAEM, AAEM president, talked about his reasons for wanting to see emergency medicine as a worldwide specialty; Bob Suter, DO, past president of both ACEP and IFEM gave the keynote address, emphasizing that emergency medicine was "the people's specialty." The Deputy Chief of Mission from the U.S. Embassy and the vice minister of the Vietnamese Ministry of Health also gave remarks during the opening ceremony.

I want to emphasize that my role in this was merely one of a facilitator. The groundwork laid through many years of hard work by the Good Samaritan Medical & Dental Ministry was what made this meeting a huge success. To support future faculty who are expected to spend time in the old imperial capital city of Hue, the ministry is purchasing a multi-story, fully equipped, air-conditioned house within easy walking distance of both Hue College of Medicine and Pharmacy and Bach Mai Hospital. If you are interested in contributing your time to this project, contact Carter Hill at CarterHill@Comcast.net.

It was a huge privilege and honor for me to get involved in this program. My involvement was serendipitous, and I was overjoyed to know enough people to make this happen. It's further proof of something I already knew – that the thousands of people from around the world who love emergency medicine are all part of the same global family. I cannot thank them enough for having made this meeting a success beyond our wildest dreams.

...and the people of Vietnam will now have emergency specialists to care for them in their hours of need.

On short notice, I was asked to give closing remarks on the last day of the ceremony. I sketched some notes on a sheet of paper. An approximation of this talk is included below:

The 2010 Emergency Medicine Symposium Closing Remarks

Joe Lex, MD FAACP FAAEM – Symposium Chair

Emergency medicine is the specialty of "now"...and not just because it is the newest specialty in the house of medicine. It's the specialty of "now" because whatever we do must be done now. While the concept of emergency medicine has existed as long as one human being cared for another, it was a long time in being recognized as its own distinct entity, with a specific anatomy and physiology.

As Dr. Suter so accurately noted in his keynote address a few days ago, emergency medicine is the people's specialty. It developed because the people wanted medical care when they wanted it, and the founders of the specialty responded. In doing so, they not only changed medicine, but they changed the people's expectation of what medicine should and could be, and then there was no turning back. And nurses were very much a part of that process; they demanded qualified physicians to care for their patients in the emergency department.

You heard Dr. Blumstein give his "selfish" reason for wanting emergency medicine in Vietnam. When his two children travel the world and explore its wonders, he wants them to have access to the same high quality emergency care they would receive in the United States, Canada and the many other areas where emergency medicine has grown and matured.

Dr. Blumstein is not alone. At this meeting, you have heard and seen more than 60 emergency physicians and nurses from around the world - United States, Canada, The Netherlands, Australia, Thailand - who feel this way. They know the power of emergency medicine to save and change lives, and they know that the power gets stronger first and foremost through sharing. That is why they came on their own time to help you, taking away nothing but memories and the knowledge that emergency medicine is one step closer to being a worldwide specialty.

Ask any one of them, and they will tell you that practicing emergency medicine is the best job in the world. I hope these teachers have opened your eyes to the possibilities of emergency medicine. I hope they have opened your heart to the necessity of emergency medicine. And I hope they have opened your mind to the power of emergency medicine to change people's lives for the better.

The journey to emergency medicine is long and difficult, but you have taken the first steps. With the commitment to a training program at Hue College of Medicine and Pharmacy, they are strong steps. With contributions of a textbook from Dr. Cameron, free subscriptions to EMedHome from Dr. Nunez, and free access to invaluable educational materials from Emergency Medicine Reviews and Perspectives (thank you Dr. Herbert), CME Download (thank you Dr. Mandavia), Challenger Inc. (thank you Mr. Sweeney), Emergency Medical Abstracts (thank you Dr. Bukata), and Audio-Digest Emergency Medicine (thank you Mr. Osmond), you have been given a wealth of information to use to improve the care of your patients. By using free downloads from FreeEmergencyTalks.net, you can educate yourself whenever you like.

I too have a selfish reason: in 1968 as a medic with the 25th Infantry Division, I practiced emergency medicine in Vietnam. It is one of the great joys of my life to return 42 years later and help you on your journey to establishing emergency medicine as a specialty.

You have complex times facing you, but the conclusion is inevitable. You will change the way medicine is practiced, and you will change expectations for what medicine can be for the people of Vietnam. Welcome to the best job in the world - emergency medicine.