FELLOWSHIP

LEARNING WITHOUT BORDERS

Dr Benjamas Kiatkasemsan from Thailand shares her fellowship experience in SGH, Department of Anaesthesiology



Dr Benjamas Kiatkasemsan (second from right) with colleagues in the Operating Theatre

What was your impression of Singapore's healthcare industry?

Even though the cost of healthcare in Singapore is quite high, Singapore's healthcare system is apparently eminent and easily accessible with reasonable referral system. Furthermore, patients' waiting times are short, even at public hospitals.

Are there any differences compared to the healthcare industry in your country?

Thailand's healthcare system is almost fully subsidized for Thai citizens. However, public hospitals are always overcrowded and waiting times can be very long. The accessibility to specialized care is also limited in public hospitals.

Why did you choose to apply to Singapore/SGH for your attachment?

I had a chance to attend a lecture by Assoc. Prof. Hairil Rizal Bin Abdullah at Chulalongkorn Memorial hospital in Bangkok and realized that SGH Preoperative Evaluation Clinic is very well-established and provides a comprehensive care, which includes risk screening and optimization, consultation, prehabilitation and patient education, to almost all patients scheduled for elective surgery. Together with the fact that my institute is planning to set up an ambulatory surgery center, it would be beneficial to learn and understand common concerns and problems from patients in preoperative evaluation clinics. Also, I believe that patients' characteristics in Thailand and Singapore are very similar.



Dr Benjamas Kiatkasemsan (standing in front, second from left) with nursing colleagues

Did you face any difficulties (e.g. culture, language) during your attachment? What were they?

The only difficulty I had was a language barrier, for instance, some patients preferred to communicate in Mandarin. Luckily, all nurses and colleagues were more than willing to help me with translation and patients were also patient with me.

During your attachment, what was a 'typical' day like?

Normally, I started working as a clinical observer at 8.30am, either in operating theatre or Preoperative Evaluation Clinic. In Operating theatre, I mainly observed how SGH operated "Day Surgeries" especially in anaesthesia part and had opportunities to see anaesthesia practice for other kinds of surgery which I am interested in, such as spine surgery and bariatric surgery. On the other hand, in PEC, I had a chance to see all the workflow of the clinic and also had a chance to evaluate real patients who were scheduled for elective surgery. I usually stayed until 5.00pm or until the case I observed were completed. After work, I sometimes joined workout classes, like barre and Pilates or tried new restaurants or even local hawker centres.

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Dr Benjamas Kiatkasemsan (seated, second from left) with supervisor, Dr Jacqueline Sim (seated, first from left), A/Prof Hairil Rizal Bin Abdullah (seated, second from right) and other colleagues enjoying a meal

What were your learning experiences?

Even though my attachment programme lasted only 3 months, my supervisor, Dr. Jacqueline Sim, tried her best to fulfil my learning objectives and accommodate my further request to observe in other area of my interests. Besides, other anaesthesia consultants, residents and medical officers were willing to answer all my questions and involved me in many department's activities such as Christmas party and Chinese New Year party. Nurses and physical therapists were helpful and very nice to work with; they also explained the detail of workflow both in PEC and in ambulatory surgery centre to me since my day 1.

How has the attachment made an impact on you?

Since Chulalongkorn Memorial hospital is now planning to set up an ambulatory surgery centre, what I have learned from this attachment programme inspire me a lot and I wish to improve preoperative clinic in my hospital to be more organized and more comprehensive in order to support the establishment of the ambulatory surgery centre.

Do you have any interesting/memorable experience during your attachment that you would like to share?

Yes, it is just about how nice SGH consultants were. Most of the times, once they knew I was a new foreign fellow, they tried to ask me what I wanted to do or want to try and helped me accomplish my goals. It is not only about the attachment programme, but also in general issues. For example, one day I mentioned that I wanted to try laksa, but I was not sure which one was good, my consultant of that day then ordered a very nice laksa for lunch and this kind of things happened many times. One consultant even introduced me to his Thai friend in Singapore; in case I needed any help.



Dr Benjamas Kiatkasemsan (standing in front, second from right) with supervisor, Dr Jacqueline Sim (standing behind in black) and other colleagues

What did you enjoy most during your attachment?

Apart from the time in SGH, I did enjoy exploring Singapore a lot. I usually spend my time after work and on weekends visiting tourist places, parks and aquariums as well as trying local cuisines. I have been to many hawker centres and tried many local dishes such as laksa, chicken rice and prawn mee. I also loved strolling around the city which I could do that unworriedly since Singapore is so safe.

Would you recommend SGH to interested fellows? Why?

Of course I will, especially to fellows from my country, for a few reasons. First, our patient characteristics are quite similar, therefore it is easy to understand their culture and also easy to live here. Second, SGH is one of the best hospitals in the world, which is well known for its high standard of care, numbers of specialty centres and advanced technologies. Besides, SGH has an efficient workflow which also focus on patient safety. Last, all staffs here, including PGMI staffs and consultants, are very helpful. Many consultants are very enthusiastic in teaching and doing research. Ultimately, we are able to learn a lot from being a fellow here.

How would you describe your fellowship experience in 3 words?

Eye opening, Enjoyable, Motivative