

## Elective Report

By Natasha Shrikrishnapalasuriyar

Vietnam's health status has improved over recent years despite their socio economic status.<sup>1</sup> Even though, there has been a decrease in the number of vaccine preventable diseases such as measles, infectious diseases such as Tuberculosis (TB) is continuing to persist. Recently there has been an increase in road traffic accidents as well as patients presenting with "lifestyle conditions" such as diabetes.<sup>2</sup> These conditions are managed using the oldest form of medicine, traditional medicine. This report describes the differences between the U.K and Vietnam in terms of its health care, focusing on TB and the use of traditional medicine in various conditions.

**What are the prevalent tropical conditions that present in Vietnam and how do these differ from the U.K? Compare the rate of other tropical conditions that occur in south east asia?**

Infectious disease such as malaria, TB and parasitic conditions are common throughout Vietnam due to the level of sanitation. During my placement, I was able to observe the patients on the TB ward and explore the differences between Vietnam and the U.K.

TB is still a major problem across Vietnam. In 2009, the WHO, estimated that the prevalence of TB is 333 per 10000 and there are approximately 145,000 new cases of Tuberculosis per year.<sup>2</sup> In the U.K, all patients are given and treated in their own side room to ensure that there is no cross contamination. In Vietnam, patients are only assigned to a side room, depending on their economic status or the severity of their illness. If an individual cannot afford a side room they are treated with other patients in an open ward. These wards do not have curtains to separate each patient and beds are touching each which increases the risk of cross contamination. In the U.K, there is a big emphasis on infection control by ensuring that each individual who enters the ward washes their hand using hand gel. However, this is not the case in Vietnam. On the TB ward, there were no hand gel bottles which meant that doctors do not disinfect their hands between seeing patients. There is also no notification policy in Vietnam. In the U.K, if a patient presents with TB, the doctor must alert the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention and family members who the patient may have been in contact with so that they are immediately tested and treated.

One similarity between the U.K and Vietnam is that a face mask is worn by the doctors and students when visiting patients. However, the main difference was that in the U.K, a new a face mask is used for each patient, whereas in Vietnam, the same mask is used. This is due to the lack of funding which limits the number of masks available. Patients with TB are managed using a standard triple therapy which is the same in the U.K

**Explore the structure of the health care system in a primary and secondary setting.  
Explore the private and public sector of the health care.**

There are more than 3000 health services across Vietnam providing health care for local communities. There has been a gradual change in health services. During the war, there were only services available in the main cities, which meant that people in rural areas had no access to health care. In 1986, the Ministry of Health raised the priority with regards to primary health care services by focusing on health education, increasing the number of services and ensuring an adequate supply of medicines.<sup>3</sup> This allowed basic health needs to be provided to local communities. Primary Health care in Vietnam is similar to the U.K and consists of midwives, doctors and community health care workers.

Vietnam health care is funded through public and private health care. It has been reported that Vietnam spends around 5-6 % Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on the private and public sectors of the health care.<sup>1</sup> The public health aspect plays a role in research and training. In Vietnam, only children under the age of 6 receive free health care. Adults are provided with schemes by the Vietnamese Health insurance that provide part of their health care and the rest is funded by the individual. These “out of pocket payments” by the individual is an important source for hospitals.<sup>1</sup> This means that people who can afford to pay for more health care may receive better treatment such as side rooms and quicker service than poorer patients.

**Understand the role of traditional medicine in Vietnam. Learn when acupuncture and herbal remedies are used to treat patients.**

In the U.K, traditional medicine is not commonly used. The role of acupuncture or herbal remedies are not considered first line treatment by doctors in the U.K, however, some patients may resort to these depending on their condition. However, in Vietnam, traditional medicine is a vital component of their health care.

Vietnam has two traditions, the northern Chinese remedies and the southern Vietnamese herbal remedies. These two traditions joined together to form traditional medicine and this combined with western medicine formed the different types of treatment available in Vietnam.<sup>4</sup> Even though these two medicines are different, they are based on a similar theory. Traditional medicine focuses on the mind and the body and includes different techniques such as acupuncture or drinking herbal remedies. This is shown in Figure 1.



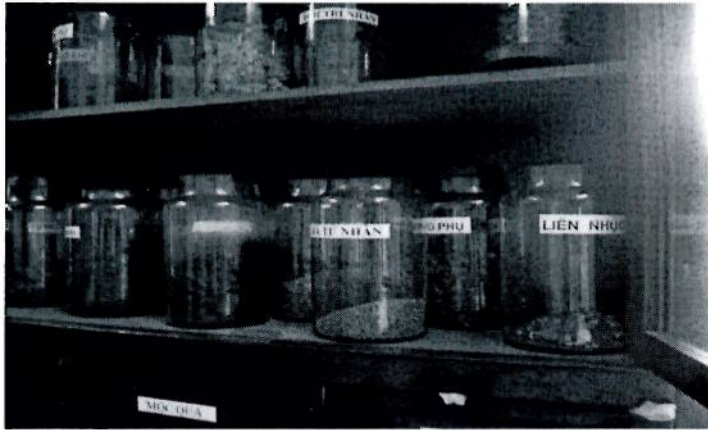


Figure 1: Herbal remedies used in the hospital

There are many different herbal remedies which are available to help with one's immune system or to treat conditions ranging from atherosclerosis to allergies. Figure 2 shows plants used in herbal remedies.



Figure 2 Plants used for herbal remedies.

It is believed that our energy flowing through our mind and body is called the chi and if the chi becomes clogged then there is an imbalance in the body. Therefore, using traditional medicine can help the chi flow freely. The chi is also related to the 5 elements; earth, fire, water, metal and wood.<sup>4</sup> Vietnamese people describe health as the yin and yang, therefore, if one of these 5 elements becomes displaced, it can disrupt the yin and yang. Each organ belongs to one of these elements, for example, the liver is classed as the element wood. If one element is disrupted, then it leads to an excessive amount of another element. This theory helps Vietnamese doctors to manage patients depending in which element is disturbed.

There is now an increase in the prevalence of "western conditions" such as diabetes in Vietnam. Vietnamese people believe that eating pineapple can help reduce the risk of developing diabetes which has led to many food dishes containing pineapple. The practical aspect of traditional medicine is acupuncture. There are many acupuncture points on the body

which can help to relieve pain (Figure 3). A common practice in the hospital is electronic acupuncture, which is used to help relieve tension across the body and mind.

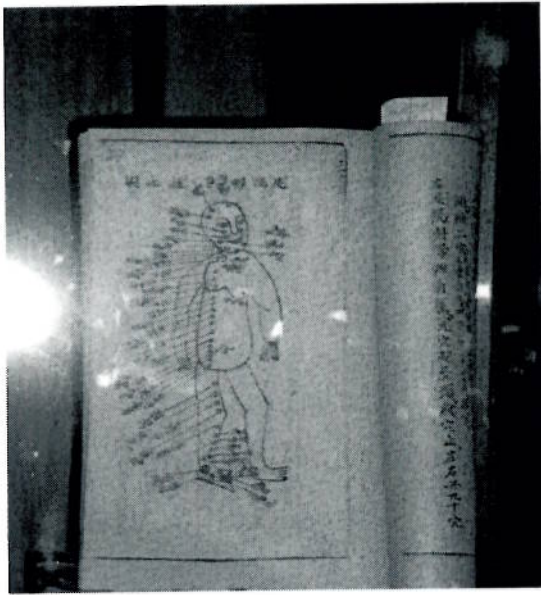


Figure 3: Acupuncture points on the body

In conclusion, spending time in Vietnam allowed me to realise that there are differences and similarities between our health system and theirs. Both the U.K and Vietnam use public and private health schemes to fund health care. TB is a major problem in Vietnam, however, this could be reduced with an improved notification policy and introducing ways to reduce cross contamination between patients. The main difference between the U.K and Vietnam is the use of traditional medicine. The use of traditional medicine in the U.K, is slowly developing in the management of patients, however, it is still not as well established as in Vietnam.

#### References

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