

PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT

Vietnamese and US Pharmacy Leaders Agree to Work Together to Expand the Role of Pharmacists and Pharmacies in Vietnam

November 12, 2005

A joint agreement to expand the role of pharmacists and pharmacies in Vietnam was signed November 12, 2005 in Ho Chi Minh City by leaders of six Vietnamese pharmacy schools, and three United States pharmacy and international health programs. The new agreement is called the VN/US Partners in Pharmacy Initiative and is supported by the Ministry of Health of Vietnam.

The agreement promotes the development of pharmaceutical care programs and the training, research, and education that underlie them.

The ultimate aim of pharmaceutical care is to ensure patients receive effective, easily used and properly stored and labeled medications for their health problems. A pharmacist, who has been trained with the clinical skills needed to care directly for patients, monitors the patient to ensure the medication is effective and does not interact negatively with foods and other medicines. For pharmaceutical care to be most effective, it is part of a patient's overall health care, which is ideally delivered by a team of health care providers.

"For pharmacy to reach this level nationwide will require the pharmacy schools to work together toward shared goals," stated Dr. Tu Minh Koong, Rector of the Hanoi University of Pharmacy. "The pharmacy leaders of the six schools in Vietnam agree on the direction and approach. It is most encouraging."

Vietnam's pharmacy programs in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Hue, Can Tho, Thai Nguyen, Tay Nguyen, and the Vietnamese Ministry of Health are joined in their goal by the School of Pharmacy and UCSF Global Health Sciences at the University of California, San Francisco and the United States Pharmacopeia.

"We can work together because we share common important professional expertise," said Dr. Le Quan Nghiem, Vice Rector of University of Medicine and Pharmacy at Ho Chi Minh City. "We believe that patients will be able to get better access to safe, effective drugs, and that pharmacists shall become a vital resource to patients and health professionals on how to use drugs most efficiently. This will be true for all of Vietnam."

"What's more, we all support the idea of teamwork across health care disciplines," added Mary Anne Koda-Kimble, Dean of the UCSF School of Pharmacy. "For when health professionals work as a group—physicians, pharmacists, nurses, traditional medicine experts—patients receive the most effective care."

The work of these partners will likely focus on six areas depending upon funding:

- Development of specific projects, such as a computer-based and pharmacist-managed system in Vietnam to share information among health care providers about medications, their best use, effectiveness, safety, storage, and quality.
- Joint research projects that together will ultimately show the best ways to provide pharmaceutical care in Vietnam and ensure safe and effective supplies of medications.
- Cross training between Vietnam and the United States of pharmacy students, faculty members, and medication quality experts.
- The further development of pharmacy school curricula in Vietnam with emphasis on patient care and medication quality and safety.

- Sharing among Vietnamese and United States partners of existing expertise and information related to pharmacy education, practice; and medication, quality and safety.
- Funding to support partnership activities.

The November 2005 agreement evolved from a conference in Hanoi in October 2004 that explored the role of pharmacists in Vietnam in HIV/AIDS medication treatment and management. Since that time, the partners have expanded the scope of their joint activities to include the underlying pharmacy structures and systems that would support HIV/AIDS therapies as well as medications used to treat and prevent other diseases.

The “Letter of Intent to Explore Collaborative Opportunities for Expanding the Role of Pharmacy in Vietnam,” was signed during the Fourth Indochina Conference on Pharmaceutical Sciences held November 10–13, 2005 in Ho Chi Minh City.

To implement their plans, the partners now seek necessary funding. Needs include funding to:

- Create a pilot computer network and a website required for health care providers in northern, central and southern Vietnam to seek and receive scientific and clinical advice on medication choice, use, and interactions.
- Support US and Vietnamese faculty and student academic exchanges.
- Support research projects to study how to apply pharmacy expertise in Vietnam in new ways.

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