

‘Patients walked 2 days to get to us’

Duke-NUS Medical School students and alumni provide medical aid in Vietnam

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While on a mission trip to Bandung, Indonesia, in 2017, medical student Lim Gim Hui did not expect to hear a fellow doctor tell a patient that he was going to die.

But being at the top of a remote mountain, hours away from the nearest hospital, meant that they had no other options to help the man, who had end-stage heart failure.

That night, Mr Lim learnt that the man died in his sleep with a smile on his face, at peace as he had finally been examined by a doctor.

Mr Lim, 34, was one of the students from Duke-NUS Medical School who participated in Project Dove (Duke-NUS Overseas Volunteering Expedition), a student-led initiative.

Students travel to less-developed countries in the region to operate medical clinics and conduct health education visits to local schools.

Last month, Project Dove went to Danang, Vietnam. To commemorate its 10th anniversary, the organising team built a toilet in one of the schools for pre-schoolers by stepping up on fund-raising efforts.

Mr Lim, project director and a year-three medical student who joined Project Dove for a second time, said: “It would be futile for us to educate the students on dental hygiene and hand-washing when they didn’t even have toilets and running water.”

This year, the team saw a bumper crop of 1,010 patients from 20 different villages, more than twice the number of patients they treated in the previous years.

The long queues meant that although consultation time ended at 5pm, operating hours usually dragged on.

Mr Lim said: “We did not turn anyone away because there were patients who walked for two whole days to get to us. No one will have the heart to turn them away even though we were exhausted and resources were running out.”

For the first time, alumni of Duke-NUS Medical School were also invited.

Dr Ignasius Aditya Jappar joined Project Dove in 2010 as a student to Batam, Indonesia. Now, nine years on, Dr Jappar, 35, is back as an alumnus.

An associate consultant at the National Heart Centre Singapore, Dr Ignasius told *The New Paper*: “The sustainability of the project convinced me to return. Many mission trips are one-off with no continuation. But Project Dove evaluates whether the area still requires help and should it not, we move on to the next.”

Ms Elizabeth Peh, 26, a year-one medical student and the logistics committee head, said: “I was able to apply what I had learnt so far to help the community there. This was a meaningful and enriching trip.”



Mr Lim Gim Hui. PHOTO:
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