

# COVID-19: Experience from Vietnam Medical Students

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## The Experience

Living in Ho Chi Minh City, one of the most crowded places in Vietnam, and also being a medical student, I have never imagined that my life would change so much due to a virus like this. In the beginning, people feel quite confident because we live in a place where people always joke that "this place is too hot for a virus to survive". But now, facing 255 cases positive with COVID-19 and more than 2000 cases are being suspected infection, nervous is something undeniable.<sup>1</sup> Since the announcement of the first case of COVID-19 on 22nd January 2020, Vietnam underwent 2 phases of the pandemic. The first phase ended with only 16 patients within one month. Unfortunately, the second phase occurs with the 17th patient in Hanoi, and the number is rising.

Back to school or not: In a stressful situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, many chancellors of the university have very confused when deciding whether to get students at home or return to school, particularly medical schools after a long break of Lunar New Year. I have a bit nervous myself after I kept getting urgent announcements about a return to the school, which usually appeared on weekends when students studying aloof from home must return to the city early to begin a new school week. However, when considering everything comprehensively, I have realized that each decision sent to our students has got to undergo many meetings. From the view of our university steering committee, medical students should return to school soon. I have thought this was the best choice as not only made us have more obtained knowledge about the disease and preventive measures but also medical students ought to seem of the core forces complementing the missing positions of medical staff when an outbreak or further spreading.<sup>2</sup>

Shifting to online classes: After the country announcement of 15-day social distancing on 1st April, the only choice now is online learning.<sup>3</sup> Online courses address the issue of providing clinical knowledge for medical students to some extent; nevertheless, this type of studying is never a close replacement to hall lectures and clinical rounds. Learning online via meeting software means participants can only interact with one person at a time, which means there would be no group

discussions, no debate on clinical decisions. Also, professors will find it difficult to collect all student's ideas or to perceive the overall understanding of the class.

As William Osler "He who studies medicine without books sails an uncharted sea, but he who studies medicine without patients does not go to sea at all", due to the pandemic, medical students should be on their clinical rotations in hospitals for their own and the society's safety.<sup>4</sup> This comes with drawbacks that medical students in their clinical years will suffer from a lack of clinical experience as well as the skills to make on-point clinical decisions, which is of utmost importance for to-be doctors.

"Raising the line": In brief, the method of mitigation, including social distancing, practicing good hygiene, and isolation of confirmed cases, is the act of flattening the curve. Besides, raising the line is about expanding the health care capability to meet the rising demand so that every sick patient has enough medical support depending on their infection severe.<sup>5</sup> Our city now has the plan to recruit final-year medical students to support the situation when the thing is getting worse.<sup>6</sup> Until now, the public health final year students are sent to the Ho Chi Minh CDC to support in contact tracing of suspected and confirmed cases, detecting clusters, answering the hotline, and classify imported suspected cases.<sup>7</sup> According to our peers, the first day felt a bit uncomfortable due to the unfamiliar work. Days later, they were gaining emotional support and began to enjoy the job thanks to their training and the flow of work. These support, belief, and strict rule of personal protective make them more confident when confronted with their daily task at CDC.

To conclude, it is not exactly what I pictured myself doing when learning to become health care providers, but medical students should consciously avoid panicking. Getting highly emotional makes it hard to think clearly and act effectively during a crisis. It's been an excellent opportunity to be needed, to be trained to help safely and to learn valuable lessons from being involved. It is, after all, a different but meaningful way.

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