

## **Embracing my Vietnamese roots in medicine**

My time in Hanoi, Vietnam, has been an incredibly enriching, filled with invaluable experiences. Learning in a clinical environment in the country my parents call home has truly been a profound, full-circle moment. I've always hoped to explore my Vietnamese heritage more deeply, and to do so while simultaneously pursuing my dream of becoming a doctor has been an absolute privilege.

Stepping into Vinmec International Hospital on my first day, a wave of nerves washed over me. I was anxious about how I would be perceived by the doctors, nurses, and staff. As a Vietnamese-Canadian, my Vietnamese communication skills have always been a challenge. Growing up, I primarily used the language with my parents, and opportunities to practice have become scarce during my adulthood. The idea of navigating Vietnamese medical jargon, an entirely new vocabulary, only made me more anxious. I worried that the language barrier might deter staff from embracing me as a student, especially once they realized my Vietnamese comprehension wasn't as strong as they might expect from someone of Vietnamese descent.

However, my anxieties were quickly eased. For the most part, the staff were incredibly understanding and welcoming. Three mentors in the Anesthesia Department at Vinmec particularly stood out: Dr. Vu Anh, Dr. Chi, and Dr. Viet. I had the privilege of shadowing each of them on separate days during my placement, and they consistently went above and beyond. They patiently explained patient interactions, case details, and procedures in both Vietnamese and English, ensuring I completely understood everything. Their willingness to answer my many questions, in addition to their vast knowledge and patience, really left a profound impression on me. I am deeply grateful for their support and the invaluable moments of shared learning.

Working within the hospital and alongside its dedicated staff has offered a unique glance into the differences and similarities between the Canadian and Vietnamese healthcare systems. For instance, in Canada, medical teams often divide the patient list for individual rounds, then reconvene to discuss the collective plan. In Vietnam, it's more common for all doctors to round on each patient together as a large group, discussing treatment plans directly with the patient on the spot before further regrouping. Initially, this surprised me; I worried such a large group might overwhelm patients. However, I've come to understand its normalized here and can recognize it as a valuable opportunity for direct learning from senior doctors, who typically lead management decisions. While the approach to patient rounds differed, the operating room workflow was quite similar. Both systems prioritize a surgical checklist before procedures, and the same key players—surgeons, scrub nurses, anesthesiologists, anesthesiology nurses, and perfusionists (when necessary)—collaborate seamlessly to optimize surgical outcomes.

Being immersed in Vietnamese culture and language has been an incredibly insightful experience. Living in this community has provided me with a much-needed opportunity to practice my communication skills, something I haven't been able to do consistently in over a decade, since my last visit to Vietnam. While articulating my thoughts can still be challenging, there's a comforting sense of accomplishment when I succeed. Experiencing this at a new stage

in my life allows me to appreciate the food, the community, and the culture with much more depth.

Beyond the hospital, I've been incredibly fortunate to explore northern Vietnam, a region I'd never visited before. A trip to Ninh Binh, featuring a bike, boat, and hike tour, highlighted the breathtaking beauty of the country. The lush green mountains, historic limestone caves, and tranquil rivers were truly unforgettable.

Overall, I am profoundly grateful for this experience. I've not only gained significant clinical knowledge and learned new skills that will be invaluable for clerkship this fall, but I've also embraced a crucial personal takeaway: the importance of being grounded. In procedural specialties, it can be easy for medical professionals to lose sight of a patient's humanity during surgery, becoming overly focused on the systematic and technical aspects. It's easy to view it as "just another job." However, we must always remember that a living person is in our care, and we need to approach every procedure with this awareness, staying grounded in our purpose. Similarly, being grounded in my role as a Canadian medical student in a Vietnamese establishment was an equally vital lesson. I am here to learn from these dedicated mentors who generously dedicate their time to teach me, even when communicating in English can be difficult, much like doing so in Vietnamese is for me. This placement has instilled in me a much deeper sense of gratitude and appreciation for their time and efforts. This entire opportunity has been an absolute pleasure.