



Alumni Profile: Dr. Nhat-Khai Do (D'03) *Making a Difference in the Vietnamese Community*

AT 16 YEARS OLD, Dr. Nhat-Khai Do (D'03) emigrated to the United States as part of a humanitarian effort to assist families of former Vietnamese government officials. Her older brother had previously left Vietnam when he was 13. The reunited family at first went to Virginia and then settled in a small Pennsylvania town.

"I have received many great opportunities and help to get where I am today," says Dr. Do, who has a private dental practice in Phoenixville, Pa. "My parents had to rebuild everything from the start, and any kind of help we could get we really appreciated."

Today, Dr. Do pays that help her family received forward as one of the founding members of Vietnamese United for Health, a group established in early 2014 to provide health-care access and education to the Vietnamese community in the Philadelphia region. "I feel for these people, I could relate," Dr. Do says.

The group includes a number of health-care professionals, including Dr. Giang T. Nguyen, Assistant Professor of Family Medicine and Community Health at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, who provide a range of services, including flu shots, hepatitis B screenings, and information about such things as health insurance and gambling addiction.

Dr. Do says it is the first health-care related group in the region that specifically serves the Vietnamese community. While they thought the need was there, the group's leaders still were surprised when almost 1,000 people showed up at the first VUH event held last April at a rented Vietnamese restaurant in South Philadelphia. Dr. Do says they were expecting about 400 to 500 people to attend.

"I participate in many cultural activities through the Vietnamese community in Philadelphia," she says, "yet I didn't realize so many people needed access to health care."

It was clear Vietnamese United for Health was serving a vital purpose. "We saw some people who hadn't had any dental care," Dr. Do says. "In Vietnam, dental care would be a luxury. Many people aren't educated in prevention, they only seek help when there is a problem."

Before that first event, Dr. Do had reached out to Dr. Joan Gluch, Interim Chief of the Division of Community Oral Health, which led to there being a group of student volunteers on hand to provide additional support. For four busy hours that day, Dr. Do and several fourth-year students performed about 150 dental screenings for children up to elderly attendees, while other Penn Dental Medicine students provided oral health education.

Building on that connection, three third-year dental students this summer requested to do their honors program community project with Vietnamese United for Health. Since August, students Andrew Fraser (D'16), Travis Williams (D'16) and Henry Ma (D'16) have worked with Dr. Do at numerous community health events, teaching proper dental hygiene

practices, doing oral cancer screenings, providing information and resources for those who need additional care, as well as toothbrushes, toothpaste, and floss for hundreds of people.

“We saw the work Dr. Do was doing, and recognized an opportunity both to support a Penn Dental alumna and to reach out to an underserved community,” Fraser explains of their interest in working with the group. “It has been very rewarding to assist Dr. Do and help so many people who have attended the VUH community health events.”

Dr. Do appreciates the support they provide for the relatively new organization for which she is the only dentist. “It’s a learning experience for the students,” she says. “They’re passionate about what they’re doing.”

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Eventually, Dr. Do would like to see Vietnamese United for Health expand enough to be able to provide clinical services. “I hope in the future we will have enough funding and support so that we can provide treatment to those in need,” she says.

Despite long hours in her own practice and the demands of raising two young children, Dr. Do says the opportunity to give back to the Vietnamese community is very gratifying.

“I understand to get a new start in a new country is not easy,” she says. “I know many of these immigrants don’t have access to care due to language barriers, financial restrictions, or time. And after every volunteer event, I know we could do so much more.” ■

OPPOSITE: Dr. Nhat-Khai Do (D’03, center) with (left to right) students Travis Williams, Andrew Fraser, and Henry Ma, and Dr. Joan Gluch, Interim Chief, Division of Community Oral Health.