

# WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

## Prof Owen Ung visits past Weary Dunlop Boon Pong Travelling Fellowship Recipients

Professor Owen Ung, the head of the Breast and Endocrine Surgery Unit at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, took the opportunity to visit two former Weary Dunlop Boon Pong (WDBP) Exchange Fellows while he was in Thailand last year to attend the World Congress of Surgery.

Professor Ung visited Dr Jittima Jaroensuk at the Chonburi Hospital and Dr Noppawat Samankatiwat at the Ratchaburi Hospital, located near the border with Myanmar.

Dr Jaroensuk spent four months working under Professor Ung's supervision in 2012 while Dr Samankatiwat spent six months with the Breast and Endocrine Unit in 2011.

Professor Ung covered some travel expenses with the funds attached to the WDBP Travelling Fellowship which is designed to enable Australian mentors of Thai Fellows to visit their protégées in their local hospitals for teaching, training and support.

He said that he had been impressed with the professional progress made by the two surgeons since their time in Australia and said that while oncology services in Thailand were not as highly specialised as in Australia, they were being significantly advanced by the experience WDBP Fellows take back to their institutions.

Professor Ung said that while the breast surgery skills of Thai surgeons were excellent, they were less familiar with breast conservation and reconstruction techniques but that this was changing.

He said a signifier of this advance was that breast conservation rates had increased in both hospitals where the WDBP Fellows worked and that both surgeons had advocated for improved radiotherapy and oncology services to facilitate that increase.



Dr Jaroensuk (right) with her residents

"There is no doubt that the WDBP Fellowships in Australia have had a significant influence on both Dr Jaroensuk and Dr Samankatiwat," he said.

"For both of them, there are challenges due to limited resources, however, they adapt well to the circumstances and work hard to develop their surgical services.

"Women undergoing mastectomy are offered reconstruction in both the Chonburi and Ratchaburi hospitals, but of course the reconstructive rates are quite low by comparison to our health system.

"Nevertheless, women who do want reconstruction are generally offered pedicled TRAM flaps and these are performed skilfully with a high degree of success by both these breast surgeons.

"Implant based reconstruction, while common in our environment, is a less

attractive option in Thailand due to the cost of prostheses."

Following her time working under Professor Ung's supervision, Dr Jaroensuk spent time at the National Cancer Institute in Bangkok and upon her return to Chonburi Hospital, became the lead surgeon for breast cancer surgery while also specialising in pancreatic cancer and trauma surgery.

According to Professor Ung, she is now working to develop breast conservation services, introduce formalised multidisciplinary oncology meetings and broaden surgical audits.

**"I believe both surgeons have certainly benefited from the WDBP Fellowship"**

While visiting the hospital, Professor Ung presented a breast cancer lecture attended by the entire surgical department and conducted a number of complex procedures.

"I performed a total mastectomy and axillary clearance for a patient who had received neoadjuvant chemotherapy for a locally advanced breast cancer because Dr Jaroensuk was keen for me to demonstrate for her trainees the surgical technique she had observed during at her time at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital," he said.

"While cancer multidisciplinary meetings have not been formalised, Dr Jaroensuk is certainly working towards that and a great collaborative approach has been developed following her observations in Brisbane."

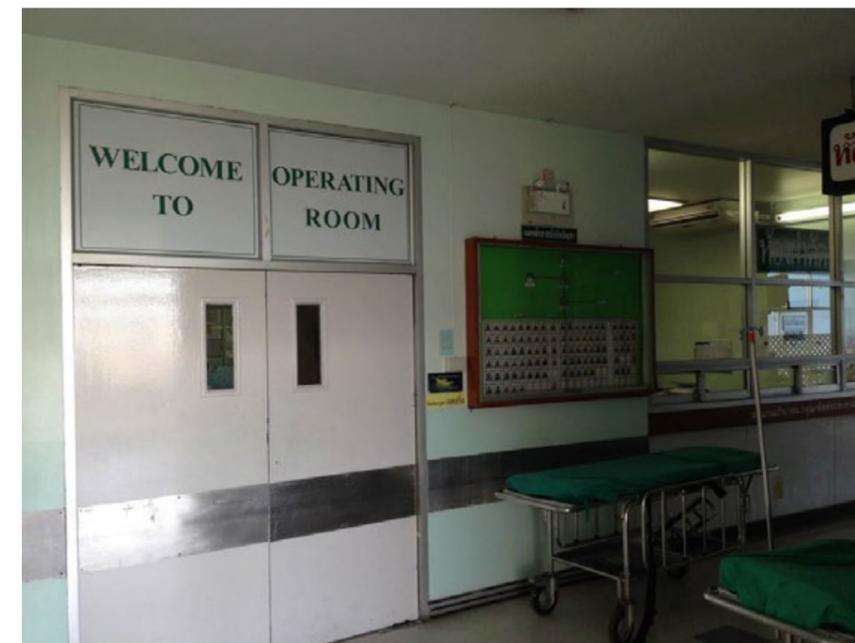
After the World Congress of Surgery, Professor Ung travelled west of Bangkok up to the border of Myanmar to spend time with Dr Samankatiwat at Ratchaburi Hospital, the main service and teaching hospital for the province.

He said that since his return to Thailand, Dr Samankatiwat had become the Head of the hospital's Breast Unit and the Director of the hospital's Cancer Services which gives him responsibility for all cancer services including radiation oncology, medical oncology and imaging.

While there, Professor Ung delivered a series of lectures and participated in the discussions surrounding various case presentations.

"Dr Samankatiwat has been very much influenced by his time at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital and has established multidisciplinary oncology meetings and developed into an astute administrator," Professor Ung said.

"He has been able to obtain services and support for cancer management in his hospital and last year, his unit submitted abstracts to the St Gallen Breast Cancer Conference in Switzerland which dealt with the choices women make between mastectomy and conservation.



Operating room entrance - Chonburi Hospital

"They concluded that the doctor's explanation had the greatest impact upon those choices.

"That has a direct bearing on the experience of the surgeons and thus, if we have the opportunity in Australia to broaden the experience of younger surgeons such as these two, it makes sense that we will see greater use of breast conservation techniques for appropriate tumours."

Professor Ung has been a former Chair of the Breast Section of the RACS, the Breast Group of the Clinical Oncology Society and is the current Chair of the RACS Queensland State Committee. Through his roles at the Breast Cancer Institute at Westmead in Sydney and now at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital he has received many International Fellows from all corners of the world and always finds the exchange rewarding and valuable for both host and visitor.

He said he became involved in the WDBP Exchange Fellowship at the request of former RACS President, Professor Michael Hollands and said he greatly enjoyed the mentoring and mutual learning involved in supervising such skilled and dedicated surgeons.

"I believe both surgeons have certainly benefited from the WDBP Fellowship," he said.

"They have been able to take these experiences back to their respective hospitals and it is clear that this has influenced the development of their departments."

The Weary Dunlop Boon Pong Exchange Fellowship provides opportunities for Thai Surgeons to obtain further exposure in general or specialist surgery, gain experience in clinical research and develop management skills in a multi-disciplinary environment.

The College is seeking expressions of interest from Departments of Surgery or Heads of Surgical units of any specialty who feel they can offer a milieu in which young Thai surgeons can obtain experience.

With Karen Murphy

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