

## **Songkran: a novel medical school module for Thailand**

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### **What problem was addressed?**

International medical education collaborations are becoming increasingly popular. One important consideration when engaging in such relationships is to ensure that curricular changes are grounded in an understanding of local sociocultural and healthcare contexts. Not only is this important to improve the quality and applicability of the programme, it also helps to ensure that graduates develop a sense of social responsibility and an understanding about local health challenges. This, in turn, may help to keep graduates working in the region and prevent doctors moving from lower-income to higher-income countries when qualified to do so – a phenomenon often described as “brain drain”<sup>1</sup>.

University College London Medical School (UCLMS) are currently engaged in an academic collaboration with HRH Princess Chulabhorn College of Medical Sciences (PCCMS) to establish a new undergraduate medical programme. The new programme, sponsored by HRH Princess Chulabhorn Mahidol, has a clear mission to be of Thailand, by Thailand, and for Thailand. The vision is that PCCMS medical graduates will be highly competent doctors who will serve the Thai population.

### **What was tried?**

The UCLMS and PCCMS teams have designed a contemporary curriculum that integrates scientific and clinical disciplines in a series of systems-based horizontal modules. Using approaches and structures from the established undergraduate medical curriculum at UCLMS, these horizontal modules are combined with vertical modules that weave in clinical and professional topics.

In order to ensure the programme is grounded in the health priorities of Thailand, a vertical module called Songkran has been developed. Songkran is the name of a traditional New Year festival that is celebrated throughout Thailand and marked by a national holiday. The Songkran vertical module, which runs through all years of the medical programme, includes topics from across the traditional curriculum. For example, in the early years of the programme, cardiopulmonary resuscitation is taught in the Songkran module, with a focus on providing emergency care during festivals. In the later years, meanwhile, healthcare topics linked to Songkran, such as sexual health promotion, are also covered within the module. The module introduces students to Thai traditions, practices, religious ideas, and health beliefs by linking them to core biomedical and clinical topics.

### **What lessons were learned?**

The Songkran module has become an integral part of the new PCCMS medical curriculum. Using a vertical module structure allows local health and sociocultural topics to fit into a busy and stretched curriculum by integrating them with core medical topic areas. It has also mobilised educators from all years of the curriculum to engage with the module's aims. The appointment of an academic clinician as Songkran module lead has facilitated this integration across the entire programme.

A surprisingly large amount of material from the undergraduate medical curriculum can theoretically be incorporated into a module with a local and community focus. The challenge, in fact, is ensuring a coherent narrative and consistent presence throughout the programme to guide students and help them to maximise relevant learning opportunities as they emerge.

1. Krotz L: Poaching foreign doctors. *The Walrus* 2008; 39 – 45