

REPORT OF MY EXCHANGE PROGRAM

At Mahidol University, Thailand

Chihiro Tsuchiya

1. Introduction

This report summarizes my semester on the Student Exchange Program during the session 2015 August 1st to September 26th at the faculty of public health in Mahidol university.

By attending this program, I could achieve my aim which is learning the state of Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in Thailand, policy for NCDs, and achieved to conduct community survey related to NCDs in Bangkok.

At first the report will give an overview on the exchange university, Mahidol University, and briefly explains the activities I experienced.

Next I will write on my study experience. Finally I will describe my activities without academic aspects, cultural exchange, impression about Thailand and experiences I had in Thailand.

2. Studying in Thailand

2.1. An overview of Mahidol University

Mahidol University is the first high educated institution in Thailand, which started as a medical school founded at Siriraj Hospital in 1890. The university was named by king Bhumidol Adulydej after his father, Prince Mahidol of Songkla, who was respected to be the father of Modern Medicine and public Health in Thailand. Mahidol university has been expanded into a university which has various departments and numerous number of students. Mahidol University has 3 campuses and 5 hospitals in Bangkok, and I studied in the faculty of public health in Phayathai campus.

2.2 Study Experience in Mahidol University

2.2.1 The states of Non Communicable Diseases in Thailand

The prevalence of obesity is increasing rapidly in Thailand. According to WHO, Thailand has the second highest population of obesity in Southeast Asian nations. Previous national health examination study in 2009 in Thailand showed that BMI among Thai adults man was 23.9kg/m² and BMI among women was 24.4mg/m². The prevalence is much higher than Japan and This study also says that the prevalence of obesity is much higher in urban area than rural area.

2.2.2 Life style behavior in Thailand

Lifestyle in Thailand has been changing rapidly because of fast growing economy. I witnessed some unhealthy behaviors in Bangkok.

At first, the biggest concern is the environment which gives people unhealthy diet behavior among Thai people. For example, a lot of fast food restaurant such as Doughnuts shops and hamburger shops, and coffee shops which provides coffee with a lot of amount of sugar, and convenient stores which provides processed foods. Even in the food court in the hospital, I saw a lot of fast food. More over, there are a lot of unhealthy shops on the street such as deep fried chicken, pork and doughnuts on the street.

Next, what I was surprised in Thailand is that people eat out frequently. They often get foods on the street or restaurant or canteen, and take out them and eat at home. In Japan it is not normal, because most women think it is their duty to cook at home and another one of the reasons is that eating out is very expensive in Japan. On the contrary, many people do not have own kitchen in their apartments, besides cooking by themselves is not so expensive in Thailand, and cooking at home is much more costly. Because of these reasons, eating out is common in Thailand. I had experience to learn Thai food during my study, and learned that home made Thai food is required a lot of ingredients such as various kinds of spice, halves and vegetables, so it might be hard work to cook every day for working people.

In Thailand For taking out of foods, they provide most of menu putting into plastic bag even noodle, juice and soup, which was very ecological than too much packing with boxes, cups and bags like in Japan. I am concerning that the

behavior eating out frequently should be hard to understand what kinds of ingredients are used and how much oil, sugar and food additives are included.

2.3 Health Promotion in Thailand

As I already mentioned, obesity is very concerned problem in Thailand among children and adults. To tackle this problem, I saw some efforts by government that people can do exercise, and keep them healthy. I saw many parks and campus in the university. They had a trail all of the parks which navigated jogging for people. As I was walking around the parks I also saw various type of outdoor gym with equipment for exercise, and people used it.

When I went to parks in the city, I saw many people were running, or dancing, or doing yoga, or many exercise. Especially people love aerobics. The government pays aerobic instructor to hold aerobics class in the park. In the case of Mahidol university, university pays aerobics instructor. They stand on a stage and start to play their music and do aerobics everyday including weekends. I also attended the class, and did with more than 200 people everyday.

I thought It is a great idea to make people motivate and participate to tackle obesity by government, and I wished that I could have more community activities and huge park in my city in Japan.

Conclusion

By learning through this program I could learn the state of NCDs in Thailand. To achieve my aim, my advisor in Mahidol university, Dr Kwanjai organized fruitful activities. Fortunately I could have chance to attend an international conference. I met many professors and students over the world and could exchange our information, and they inspired me a lot.

It was busy days everyday, so I could not have a lot of time to go sightseeing though, I could stay with many Thai and International friends in the campus and talked about many topics. Through communication with them, I could learn Thai culture, and history.

Unfortunately I experienced very sad incident which 2 bombs exploded in the central of Bangkok and killed and injured many people. The place was just 3 km far from my apartment, and there was very famous place I sometimes went. It was very sad, and I felt dangerous to go out. The city in Bangkok changed because of the incident, smile disappeared from their faces, and many tourists disappeared from the city. It was very quiet time after 1 week of the sad news. I have never felt this kind of fear in my life, and also I appreciated the peaceful life in Japan. I really hope nothing will happen in Thailand, and people will overcome this hard time sooner. I will never forget all of experiences in Thailand, and keep studying hard to achieve my aims.

Finally, I would like to thank people who have generously taken care of me during my stay.

