



*True success is not in the learning, but
in its application to the benefit of mankind*

Mahidol Songkla M.D.

Thai Scholars Fellowship Fund Endowment: The Legacy of Prince Mahidol and His Family

In December 2017, the Harvard University T.H. Chan School of Public Health (HSPH) established a Thai Scholars Fellowship Fund in honor of King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Prince Mahidol of Songkla. HSPH established this in conjunction with the Thai Physicians Association of America (TPAA) and the King of Thailand Birthplace Foundation (KTBF). The goal is to raise \$1.5 million (Bt45.5 million) to create an endowed fund that will support Thai students, doctors, nurses, and public health professionals from Thailand to study at HSPH. Upon returning to Thailand, these scholars can then play major roles in advancing Thailand's public health and medicine.

The Thai Scholars Fellowship Fund continues the altruistic spirit of Prince Mahidol who, a century ago, donated his personal funds (Bt200,000) to establish the *Medical Science Scholarship* for students seeking higher education in science at Chulalongkorn University. Additionally, Prince Mahidol also generously donated \$1,000 to the Harvard Endowment Fund. In 2016, we held a symposium at HSPH headlining, “*A Century of Progress in Public Health and Medicine in Thailand*,” as a campaign to continue Prince Mahidol’s legacy.

The Thai Scholars Fellowship Fund is partially endowed, and thus, already available to sponsor Thai students at HSPH. **Pear Pongsachareonnont, M.D.** is the first recipient of the Thai Scholars Fellowship Fund. In the Fall 2019, Dr. Pear began a 2-year Masters of Public Health program with a focus on epidemiology (via online/on-campus program). She feels deeply honored and grateful to have the opportunity to follow in Prince Mahidol’s footsteps, and she hopes to fulfill his vision of improving the collective health of the Thai people.

Dr. Pear is a 38-year-old ophthalmologist from Bangkok specializing in adult retina disease. Presently, she is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Ophthalmology in the Faculty of Medicine at Chulalongkorn University, which is the same school where she obtained her medical degree, residency training in ophthalmology, and retina surgery training. She also completed two fellowships in vitreoretinal surgery: (a) a research fellowship in vitreoretinal disease at the University of California at San Francisco and (b) a clinical retinal surgery fellowship at the University of Toronto, Canada.

Amidst her clinical and academic duties, she developed an interest in research methodology and health technology assessment and thus, decided to pursue admission to HSPH. This is in addition to completing her doctoral degree at Chulalongkorn University. Her focus is on the health utility and quality of life of diabetes-related complications. She also serves as secretary for the Asean Ophthalmic Society, whose aim is to facilitate and connect ASEAN countries to achieve the prevention of blindness. And, she serves on the board of the Thai Retina Society. The experience provided through an MPH in epidemiology at HSPH will make her better equipped to improve public health in Thailand as well as expand the scope of her clinical and academic responsibilities at the medical school.

Dr. Pear provided information that may be helpful for prospective applicants to HSPH.

Question: How will you utilize the knowledge gained at HSPH?

Answer: To improve my understanding and management of health programs that may benefit the people of Thailand. Namely

1. *Knowing more about public health policy.* I currently work with the Ministry of Public health in the ophthalmology program. After graduating from HSPH, I will become more involved in the health policy of Thailand, particularly within the ophthalmology field. I also will be a part of the ophthalmology public health team, which aims to improve ophthalmology health care in community care of Thailand.

2. *In-depth in biostatistics and STATA usage.* I can use this knowledge to teach medical students and residents. I also can integrate this knowledge in all of her epidemiology projects.
3. *Emphasize how to be a leader in health care.* As a part of the AOS prevention of blindness program, they have just started a project that aims to improve the accessibility of the healthcare system in remote areas by using telehealth. I will assist in planning the infrastructure of retina treatment service in Thailand.
4. *Inspire and encourage students to evaluate public health problem and how to deal with the problem.* As a team focusing on ophthalmic epidemiology, this knowledge will help me tackle the public health problem of Thailand.
5. *The connection between cohort, Harvard, and a student's country.* The connection is important. I can help run a campaign that can help benefit people in the country.

Question: What are your thoughts on the Thai Scholars Fellowship Fund?

Answer: The Fund means a lot for a student who comes to attend HSPH. To enroll at Harvard is difficult but to graduate is even harder. The tuition fee of Harvard is extremely high compared to the modest incomes in Thailand. This fund helps relieve some of the financial burden, which makes obtaining the degree possible.

Question: What are your qualifications for admission to HSPH?

Answer: I believe that HSPH admitted me because of my credentials and work history. In particular, I have worked in academic medicine throughout my career (Chulalongkorn University). After graduation from HSPH, I want to expand my reach in ophthalmology and teach younger generations of doctors in Thailand.

Question: How did you prepare for the application to admission?

Answer: I began preparing last September by studying Math and English. After I received the test results in early November, I applied to SOPHAS matching system for public health schools. The deadline was on December 1, 2018. In general, it is very important to complete all tests and paperwork early.

Dr. Pear encourages Thai people to study at HSPH, which is possible given the support from the Thai Scholars Fellowship Fund. One must possess the qualifications (as outlined by the university), and to apply for support through the Harvard Financial aid system, the students must write an essay explaining why they need a scholarship and provide financial information as requested. Most importantly, the students must also show how they will use the knowledge learned at HSPH to benefit the people of Thailand.

The Thai Scholars Fellowship Fund fundraising team highly encourages Thai physicians, public health professionals, and students to apply to HSPH and to benefit from the Fund's support. We

are grateful for the contributions received from generous supporters to this endowment fund. Your contribution is a powerful tribute to Prince Mahidol, Princess Mother Srinagarindra, and their son, King Bhumibol Adulyadej. It will help to ensure that their legacy continues in perpetuity.

To support more students, we need more contributions to this endowed fund. Make tax-deductible contributions in Thailand to the endowed fund by contacting Prince of Songkla Foundation at inter@medicine.psu.ac.th. Donate to HSPH by visiting www.hsph.harvard.edu/give; indicating "Thai Scholars Fellowship Fund" or contact TPAA Foundation treasure at tvachir@yahoo.com. For details about the fund and how to apply, please contact Cholthanee Koerojna at ktbf@thailink.com.

KTBF is a non-profit organization that established and maintains the King Bhumibol Adulyadej Birthplace memorial site at King Bhumibol Square adjacent to King Rama IX's birth site at Mount Auburn Hospital and Harvard University, and has placed several plaques at old homes and sites along the Trail of Thai History throughout New England that are associated with the legacy of the Royal Family.



Pear Pongsachareonnont, M.D.