MEDICAL STUDENT PLACEMENT APPLICATION INFORMATION PACK

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I. INTRODUCING THE CLINIC

The Mae Tao Clinic (MTC), also known as Dr. Cynthia’s Clinic, was established in 1989 by Dr. Cynthia Maung and five other Burmese refugees who left Burma to flee the violence during the 1988 Student Protest.

Over the past 20 years, MTC has grown from a small house serving Burmese pro-democracy students fleeing the 1988 crackdown to a busy clinic providing free health care in multiple areas for an increasing number of Burmese migrant workers and people crossing the border from Burma.

The clinic also acts as a centre for health professionals training. The trainees have various backgrounds. Some are from refugee camps along the border, local health departments and villages within Burma.

MTC is also affiliated with the Backpack Health Worker Team, established to provide outreach health services to remote villages within Burma. Whereas previously much of their update workshops and training had been conducted within the clinic, since then, their separate headquarters have been established in Mae Sot. Since it’s founding, the Backpackers Health Worker Team has, grown into a large organisation consisting of 76 backpack teams. Before 1997, it had been possible for foreigners to go inside Burma to help in various clinics inside Karen state. For security and safety reasons, however, it is no longer advisable for foreigners to join this programme.

The clinic is also linked with the School Health Scheme, which includes 54 migrant schools around Mae Sot for children of local migrant workers who are not entitled to Thai education services. Each of the 54 affiliated schools is visited by members of the School Health Scheme at least twice a year, during which the school children are provided with de-worming, Vitamin A and eye screening services. When available, the children are also provided with vaccinations. Additionally, representatives of the School Health Scheme also conduct health education sessions in areas such as contraception and sexually transmitted infections.

The clinic works closely with many other government and non-government organisations working in this area and recognises the need to build and maintain a strong working relationship with local Thai authorities.

In recognition of their dedication and vision, the Mae Sot Clinic, Dr Cynthia and the staff have won many awards from various groups and organisations across the world. (Find a full list of these awards on page 20.)

**Funding and supplies are dependent on NGOs, foreign funding and private donations from all over the world.**
II. HOW THE CLINIC WORKS

Staff

A Programme Manager and a Clinical Supervisor are in charge of each department. These senior medics have usually had years of clinical experience. In addition to seeing patients, they also have the responsibility of overlooking the wellbeing of their staff as well as coordinating relevant training programmes. In fact, it is not unusual for doctors and nurses trained in foreign countries to be impressed by the level of expertise that these health workers have, despite them never having attained formal university degrees. Indeed, the challenge of maintaining a high standard of patient care despite the high turnover of junior staff is a demanding one. However, with years of experience behind them, these senior medics work very effectively in these difficult conditions.

Dr Cynthia has the final responsibility for the clinic and in difficult cases her opinion is usually sought. However, she now spends most of her time on managerial, fundraising and public relations duties. Regular meetings are held between the senior medics and her, during which problems can be discussed and policies can be implemented.

There is a lot of emphasis placed on training and teaching at MTC. After passing the initial entry exam, interns will begin the community health worker training which consists of 6 months theory and 6 months practical experience. This is done in Karen State in Burma. Following this the interns will spend 6 months to 1 year at MTC rotating through the various departments as a Community Health Worker. On completion of this they will become a Health Assistant and have the option to complete a further two years of training in order to become a Medic.

The clinic also runs an internship programme which trains individuals for other organisations such as the Backpack Health Workers and other Community base organisation. The internship programme consists of six months practical study.

Many community health workers and health assistants will return to Burma to work in various communities at different clinics along the border, therefore the turnover of junior staff members in the various departments is very high.

The medics and support staff working here receive a small stipend and are provided with accommodation, and food by the clinic. The number of people working at Dr. Cynthia's clinic at one time is variable. Currently, there are 5 Burmese doctors, one dentist, several senior medics (1-3 per department), a large number of junior medics, health assistants and community health workers and interns. There are usually a few foreign doctors, nurses, midwives and several medical elective students working in the clinic at a time.

Foreign staff

Long-Term Volunteers - The number of volunteers at the clinic varies from time to time. Long-term volunteers include not only doctors, nurses and midwives but also social workers, teachers, public health nurses and doctors, laboratory technicians and administrators.
Short-Term Volunteers - At any one time there is usually a fairly good number of medical students working and rotating through different departments for four weeks or longer depending on their agreement with the clinic.

The clinic is extremely grateful for the large numbers of helpers that it receives, however, occasionally the clinic does not have the capacity to handle the large numbers of volunteers, and we have had to reluctantly redirect newcomers to other organisations' amongst various communities.

The Patients

The patient population is made up of migrant workers from Burma living in the Mae Sot town and people travelling from within Burma itself. They are mostly Burman and Karen, but other ethnicities such as the Mon and Pa’lo are also not uncommon. For communication amongst the staff and the patients, therefore, the standard language used is Burmese, and occasionally Karen.

The clinic provides medical care as well as health education for patients visiting the clinic. Certain programmes are also in place for the people in the local community. The clinic also organises health and dental visits to local schools.

Patient Intake

The number of patients attending MTC can vary greatly depending on the slightest of changes in the precarious political situation surrounding the area that is the Thai-Burmese Border. Usually, however, an estimated 200 patients attend the clinic each day.

Working Hours

☒ The Outpatient Departments are open from Monday to Saturday and start receiving patients from 9 am until 4 pm.

☒ The Inpatient Departments work around the clock with 3 rotating shifts every 24 hours.

☒ Staff takes turns in rotating between different shifts weekly.

Language

☒ While people in Mae Sot mainly use Thai and Burmese to communicate, the people who work in MTC mainly communicate in Burmese and Karen, as most of them are from Burma.

☒ Some of the medics speak English and can translate for you but you will find that generally speaking, you will discuss the diagnosis and treatment with the medic in English and he or she will then take care of the patient. The medical records are in English although there may be Burmese words mixed in and the words may have a different meaning to what you think.

Clothing


Light cotton, silk and airy clothing is more comfortable in the warm climate. Trousers and shirts should be loose fitting and it would be a bonus if they can be washed and dried easily, especially in the wet season.

If coming in December or January, the nights can get chilly and a jumper or cardigan may be needed.

Singlets (vest tops), short shorts and skirts are not culturally acceptable whilst working at the clinic.

The general rule should be that clothing which exposes the chest, shoulders and thighs are considered culturally inappropriate at Mae Tao Clinic.

**Shoes**

Sandals or slip-ons are more appropriate as shoes are to be removed before entering any clinic, ward or the office.

When working in the Reproductive Inpatient, Medical Inpatient and Surgical departments it is highly recommended to buy a pair of indoor sandals but there are communal sandals on the ward for staff use.

**Donations**

The clinic is always in need of goods whether new or second hand. Should you be accepted for a placement and the opportunity present itself to bring something along to the clinic, the following would be much appreciated:

- Suitable clothing for adults or children
- Children’s toys
- Football boots or tennis shoes
- Exercise books, pens, pencils
- English language books and cassettes
- Medical textbooks and dictionary (English language)

The clinic is also always in need of essential medicine. For suggestions check out the MTC Medical Wish List which is posted on our website: www.maetaoclinic.org/how-to-help/donate/.
III. HEALTH SERVICES PROVIDED AT THE CLINIC

OUTPATIENT SERVICES

1) Adult Outpatient Department (OPD)

The Adult OPD is perhaps the busiest of all of the departments at MTC. It consists of six separate examination rooms. Two medics consult in each room. It is currently staffed by twelve full time medics. There are specific rooms for malaria, respiratory infections and chronic disease consultations. If the patient is prescribed medication they collect it from the pharmacy window directly opposite. There is no X-ray machine and TB cannot be treated here so patients are sometimes referred to another healthcare NGO or a Burmese government hospital.

Programme Manager: Hser Ku Paw

Senior Medic(s): Louisa or Shee May Paw

1 Volunteer Doctor

2) Child Outpatient Department (Child OPD)

The Child OPD sees up to one hundred patients a day. You may see large numbers of parents and children near the department on Monday, Wednesdays and Saturdays when vaccination clinics are conducted. Immunisations include DTPa, polio, BCG, measles and Hepatitis B. A nutrition programme monitors the children’s Z scores and provides a supplementary feeding programme. They have their own pharmacy from which medication is provided to the parents. The most common presentations are malaria, pneumonia, ARIs, diarrhoea, tropical diseases and malnutrition.

Programme Manager: May Soe

Senior Medic(s): Daxi Aye and Kyaw Myaing

1 Volunteer Paediatrician

3) Reproductive Health Outpatient Department (RH OPD)

The RH OPD provides routine antenatal care, family planning, contraception advice (including Implantations) and OPD gynaecological services. The
antenatal service offers screening for malaria, HIV, VDRL and anaemia. A common gynaecological presentation is vaginal prolapse.

Programme Manager: Sabel Moe
Senior Medic(s): Naw Ree

4) Surgical Outpatient Department (Surgical OPD)

The Surgical OPD treats minor surgical cases and provides dressings for superficial wounds. You can enter the OPD by the door to the left of the main entrance to Surgical IPD. They also can carry out minor surgery such as hernias, hydrocele and vasectomy. The patients who arrive with land mine injuries and gun shot wounds are referred to Mae Sot general hospital. In these circumstances the cost of amputation surgery is usually paid for by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). After surgery patients come back to the surgical department for the remainder recovery period.

Programme Manager: Saw Eh Ta Mwee
Senior Medic(s): Saw Law Kwa
1 Regular Volunteer Doctor

5) Dental Care Department

The dental clinic was established in 2001. The medics perform extractions, fillings, root canal therapies, false teeth replacements and general check ups. The clinical supervisor is Dr Kyaw Zayar, a dentist from Burma.

Programme Manager: Hsar Bwe Moo
Senior Medic(s): Nwe Ni
Dentist: Dr. Kya Za Yar

6) Eye Care Department

The eye clinic was established in 1995. There are twelve full time employees. They provide a large number of acute care and outreach services. The clinic provides refractory eye glasses, prosthetic eye balls, screening for thousands of children in migrant schools in surrounding areas and training for over one
thousand medics to return to remote locations to provide care to isolated communities. Vitamin A deficiency is a leading cause of blindness in children and, as a result, the Eye Clinic’s screening is an invaluable service. In addition to this, visiting ophthalmic surgeons from the UK perform cataract and glaucoma operations on over five hundred patients annually.

Programme Manager: Naw Tamalar Wah

1 Volunteer Optometrist

7) Prosthetics Department

Burma is secondary to Afghanistan in terms of the yearly incidence of land mine injuries. Maw Kel, a land mine survivor himself, founded the prosthetics department at MTC in 2000. There are six members of staff who make up to more than two hundred limbs per year. This dramatically increases the quality of life for many amputees at MTC and in IDP areas. Following their initial amputation and stabilisation at Mae Sot Hospital (MSH) land mine survivors receive food, shelter, social support and gait training at MTC. Patients are fitted with prosthetics around six month after amputation.

Programme Manager: Saw Maw Kel

Technician: Hla Htun

8) Counselling Service

The Counselling Centre offers individual counselling sessions as well as specialised group discussions and relaxation sessions. Common presentations include psychosis, alcohol cessation and PTSD. Programmes include specialised group discussions, relaxation sessions, amputee support groups and community awareness meetings. They are also involved in child protection.

Programme Manager: Saw Ku Thay

Senior Medic(s): Thaw Dar Shwe and Moe Khaing

1 Volunteer doctor
INPATIENT SERVICES

1) Adult Inpatient Department (Medical IPD)

The Medical IPD is for patients aged 13 years and over. It has 40+ beds at its disposal and deals with 3-15 admissions a day. Patients are referred to the Medical IPD either directly from the Patient Registration Department or the Adult OPD. The IPD is open twenty-four hours per day, seven days a week. There are eighty staff members who rotate on three shifts: 7am to 3pm, 3pm to 11pm and 11pm to 7am. The medics rotate weekly. Medics working in Adult and Child IPD work seven days a week.

A mixture of acute infectious disease and chronic diseases characterise the presentations at the clinic. Care is provided for patients suffering from communicable and non-communicable diseases such as Malaria, ARIs, Diarrhoea, UTIs and tropical diseases. There is a blood transfusion protocol in the Medical IPD.

Programme Manager: Mu Ni
Clinical Supervisor: Htike Htike
Senior Medic(s): Zin Mim Oo
1 Volunteer Doctor

2) Child Inpatient (Child IPD)

The Child IPD is for patients from the ages of 2 months - 12 years. It is situated directly behind Medical IPD. The Child IPD has twenty beds with some overflow space. Malnutrition is a common presentation along with pneumonia, diarrhoea, malaria, dengue Fever, congenital abnormalities and haematological diseases. Child IPD comes under the same management as the adult Medical IPD.

Programme Manager: Mu Ni
Clinical Supervisor: Htike Htike
Senior Medic(s): Pan Aye
1 Volunteer Doctor

3) Reproductive Health Inpatients Department (RH IPD)

This department cares for all obstetric, genealogical and neonatal patients. There is one large delivery room and two wards (total 20-30 Beds). If a complicated delivery requiring a caesarean is anticipated and HIV positive women are transferred Mae Sot Hospital and the clinic paid for them. The medics in RH IPD are skilled midwives and have often had to perform complicated deliveries such as breech twins. The senior medics in RH IPD can repair third degree tears. There are on average 6-8 deliveries performed each day.

Programme Manager: Sophia
Senior Medic(s): Eh Moo La and Ni Doh Paw
1 Volunteer Doctor

4) Surgical and Trauma Inpatient Department (Trauma IPD)

The trauma department operates twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. It consists of one operating theatre and 30+ beds. The trauma surgical procedures such as hernia repairs, abscess incision and drainage, hydrocele operations, skin grafts, penile injection repairs and urethral calculus extractions are performed by the senior medics. General anaesthesia is not available. Land mine survivors and other major surgical cases such as fractures and abdominal injuries are transferred to Mae Sot Hospital for stabilisation and surgery. Their post-operative care is performed by the Trauma Department at MTC. In 2008, the annual Trauma case load was 7,074 patients.

Program Manager: Eh Ta Mwee
Senior Medic(s): Saw Law Kwa and Saw Tint Tint

1 Volunteer Doctor

OTHER DEPARTMENTS

1) Voluntary Counselling and Testing Programme (VCT Clinic)

The VCT was established in 2003. It is a confidential and anonymous HIV Hepatitis B and C counselling and testing service provided six days a week. The Rapid HIV Test performed at Mae Tao Clinic Laboratory provides a result within thirty minutes. Partners of positive clients should also be encouraged to attend the VCT Clinic.

The Home Based Care (HBC) Service was also established in 2003. The idea of HBC is that by providing home visits, the clinic can ensure continuity of care while increasing opportunities for counselling on risk reduction, personal care and health education. The home-based care staff consists generally of people living with HIV who have decided they want to help others. Preventing Mother to Child Transmission of HIV (PMTCT) patients receive anti-retrovirals and were HBC’s first clients. Only eighty HIV patients are able to receive anti-retrovirals from a number of surrounding hospitals due to funding limitations.

Programme Manager: Saw Than Lwin
Senior Medic(s): Thaw Thee Lay Paw

2) Acupuncture

The acupuncture department is a popular place to refer patients who suffer from problematic symptoms, especially chronic conditions such as, sciatic nerves, back pain, knee joints, headache, paralysis related to strokes and spinal and neural problems. The department consists of a 10 person team who see around 30 – 50 patients a day.

Programme Manager: Ler Wah Say
3) **Laboratory**

The clinic has a laboratory capable of carrying out the following tests:

- Malaria smears
- Haemoglobin levels
- Blood typing for transfusion purposes
- Full/complete blood counts
- Urinalysis using reagent dipsticks
- Blood glucose
- Blood screening kits testing for HIV, Hepatitis B and C, and some venereal diseases

Additional tests may be done at Mae Sot Hospital but this is only done when absolutely essential due to the extra cost incurred.

*Programme Manager: Saw Hsa K’Baw*

4) **Blood Donation**

The Blood Bank is located at Mae Tao Clinic. It cooperates with twenty-six factories reaching a donor population of 16,450. Every potential donor is screened as per international recommendations and all serological tests are sent to Mae Sot Hospital. However, the blood supply can reach critical levels so, if you are able, please donate during your time at MTC.

*Programme Manager: Naw Shine*

5) **Patient House**

The patient house is located at the back of the clinic. It is a large open air structure that provides shelter for many patients and their families who are not inpatients but may need to stay at Mae Tao Clinic for follow up appointments. It houses approximately 80-120 people.

*Programme Manager: Saw Baw Nay Htoo*

**REFERRAL SERVICES**

When the clinic is unable to provide treatment to a patient requiring specialist care, the patient is referred elsewhere, usually to Mae Sot General Hospital. Approximately 1-3% of MTC’s caseload is referred to Mae Sot Hospital. Due to expensive referral costs and limited funding, medics follow a referral policy to ensure that each case meets the guidelines for referral. Unfortunately for patients whose survival rate is low, or who
require long-term or expensive care, medics are often unable to place them on the referral programme.

When a local treatment option is not possible, the clinic can refer the patient to Burma Children Medical Fund (BCMF). Located on the grounds of Mae Tao Clinic, BCMF is a separate organisation established by long-time clinic volunteer, Kanchana Thornton, in 2006.

BCMF was originally conceived as a way to help children from Burma, who presented at the clinic with complex medical conditions, requiring treatment or surgery that the clinic could not provide. BCMF helps these patients access healthcare at larger, Thai hospitals, primarily in Chiang Mai. BCMF facilitates the transfer of these patients to and from Chiang Mai with the approval of relevant Thai authorities. In addition, when a patient is referred to BCMF, BCMF assumes all costs associated with their care. Today, BCMF has expanded its criteria and accepts both children and adult patients into its programs. Each case is assessed on an individual basis.

BCMF works closely with the clinic, sharing office space and staff. For medical volunteers it is good to know that BCMF exists as a potential resource, operating in partnership with, but separate from clinic operations. However, it's also important to recognize that BCMF cannot accept every patient and that its resources are limited. Referral of a patient to BCMF should happen with the full agreement of the relevant clinic department and in collaboration with shift leaders and/or the clinical supervisor and programme manager as needed. If volunteers have questions about this process they should contact BCMF directly and/or ask the medics in their department.

More detailed information on all our departments and services can be found on our website.
IV. MEDICAL STUDENT PLACEMENT

Overview

☒ There are no fees to do an elective in Mae Tao Clinic.

☒ Currently, a maximum of 5-6 students are invited to work at the clinic at any given time as there are a limited number of resources available for foreign students. Priority will be given to students in their final year, with prior clinical experience. Applications are best made well in advance to ensure a place! On approving your application we will try to fit you into a time frame that best suits both yourself and the clinic.

☒ The minimum time frame for students undertaking placements at the clinic is 4 weeks.

☒ Unfortunately, due to the increasing interest from students, we often have to turn people down.

☒ Students undertaking placements at the clinic will rotate through the various departments in 1 or 2 week blocks. Should certain students have particular areas of special interest, it is usually acceptable for a longer period of time to be spent in that department provided that consultation with the medic-in-charge and administrative staff has taken place.

☒ All students are strongly encouraged to spend at least one day in the laboratory and learn how to prepare and read malaria slides.

☒ The OPD can get comparably quiet in the afternoon. You can use this time to study, teach English and play sport with the medics (talented footballers are in high demand!). Teaching English, or even some basic science or medicine a few times a week is a really great way to give back to the clinic. We trust that you will also take this time to get to know the staff at the clinic better and even form close friendships.

☒ The IPD is usually quite busy and there are many medics working there at any one time (more than 6 per shift, plus trainees). It can be overwhelming at the beginning to understand how things work and are organised. To make it a bit easier for you here are some tips:
   - There is one clinical supervisor who is in charge of the IPD overall
   - There will also be one senior medic in charge during every shift
   - The other medics will have patients allocated to them whom they will be responsible for in the duration of the shift
   - The medic least busy at any one time helps to admit any new patients
   - Medics in the IPD often take on multiple roles i.e. as a doctor, nurse and a cleaner

☒ In IPD you will normally work 8am to 3pm and in OPD you will work 9am to 4pm.

☒ Some students, after the first week, ask to do some night shifts. They are generally welcome to do so and medics appreciate it quite a lot.
Your role in the clinic

It is very important to understand that as a medical student at the clinic you work on a learning and observational basis, under the supervision of the senior staff members.

The medics work in conjunction with the medical students to take the patient history, perform physical examination, formulate diagnoses based on findings, and make treatment plans.

Medical notes are documented in English so medical students may be asked to document history and physical exam findings in the patients’ charts on ward rounds or in OPD.

The senior medic will often decide the most appropriate medic who can provide translation. Often you will shadow the assigned medic round their patients and assist them with their other duties.

Understand that everyone carries nursing and cleaning responsibilities and, if possible, help the medics not only with the discussion of cases, but also by helping with washing/feeding patients, checking IV fluids, preparing drugs for the rounds and general cleaning duties.

Much like when working with consultants in your home country, respect the medics despite their lack of formal medical training.

Do not feel compelled to make a diagnosis or decide on a treatment plan when asked by the medics. You are here to learn, not to take over patient care. Also bear in mind that there are many interns, community health workers and health assistants that require training. Please do not take over their learning opportunities. It is important to remember that in a few weeks you will be gone from the clinic but the junior staff members will remain and have a short time to become proficient in many areas.

There is a big variation in English proficiency amongst the medics. Also keep in mind that sometimes the medics do not speak the patient’s language fluently either, due to the various ethnicities that make up our staff and patients.

The medicine you will experience at the Clinic might be quite contrasted to that which you have been used to back at home. Additionally, when it comes to treatment modalities, we rely on our experience and intuition as there are a limited number of investigations that we can perform.

In general, staff use the Burmese Border Guidelines, which can be available for your reading in any of the departments.

The clinic has changed enormously in the past few years. In the past, it was much smaller and lacked well-trained personnel. Medical students coming at that time found themselves involved in all sorts of things: from teaching, delivering babies, putting up blood transfusions, to deciding on diagnosis and treatment. Also, Karen State was relatively safe and free of guerrillas and landmines and it was possible to go inside Burma and gain experience with medics in their outreach clinic. Sadly the political situation has changed and going into Burma has become extremely dangerous.
How will this experience change you?

Apart from your own reasons, experience has taught us that most medical students benefit from their experience at Mae Tao Clinic in the following ways:

- You will be exposed to a completely different approach to medicine and see how one can work with limited resources and hardly any modern technologies but still be able to make a difference for the better.
- You will see pathologies different to those that you have become used to. In addition, medical students who come to the Clinic can see first-hand the devastating effects that civil war and poverty can have on otherwise peaceful and content communities.
- You will also see tropical diseases such as malaria, typhoid, scabies, intestinal parasites and liver and lung flukes.
- You will be able to observe many cases of malaria and gain in-depth knowledge of its treatment, even for the most resistant strains of plasmodium falciparum.
- Students often form close bonds with the medics and work side by side in discussing the patient cases. You will also be able to share your skills with the medics in how to take a concise history and perform a thorough physical examination.
- You will be able to experience a culture so rich and different from your own that we hope the experience will enrich your life in return and help you to develop a higher sense of cultural appropriateness in your developing career.
- Also importantly you will hear the life stories and struggles faced by the refugees and displaced people of Burma and gain a sense of understanding of the hardships and efforts they are making towards establishing a new life away from violence and oppression.

One Medical Student’s Impression

“Since arriving 6 weeks ago I have repeatedly attempted to get my thoughts and impressions onto paper. How do you describe the sights, the sounds and above all the people of the Mae Tao clinic?

You could start by talking about the medics, committed, intelligent, skilled and friendly - they practice medicine under unbelievable conditions. While at first they seem to be chaotic and rather slapdash a few weeks spent watching them in action builds a deep respect for the compassionate easygoing but still knowledgeable approach to medicine. Just because you’ve been force fed textbooks for four years doesn’t mean that you know more than the medics when it comes to treating a patient with malaria.

The more senior medics function as a sort of combination mentor for trainees, consultant, matron and finally cultural interpreter for ‘farang’. Their knowledge in their own field rivals that of any doctor and their in-depth understanding of their patients makes them far more useful.
It would be a waste if you leave the clinic having only learnt medicine from the medics. From long chats over coffee or in a quiet afternoon you can gain an insight into a life so different from your own. The friendly, welcoming nature of the Burmese/Karen shines through despite everything going on. Many of the medics speak amazing English and even those who don’t are still keen to chat to in any means they can. Despite being purely an observer, unable to communicate, not understanding enough to offer advice and living a life of unbelievable luxury compared to the medics I never found the attitude to be anything less than welcoming and grateful.

Like every other community the clinic has its own personalities, perhaps foremost among them is MMT – medic, artist and counsellor to culture shocked ‘farang’. Intelligent, modest and an amazing source of advice he has become a friend to most, if not all of the people working at the clinic. Perhaps the most ‘farang friendly’ medic is TE, a football fanatic who speaks amazing English and appears to have an innate understanding of the western mind. If you show an interest in football then a lasting relationship based around the 5 PM clinic football match (in the field about 200 yards behind IPD) is sure to develop.

If you are a student or doctor reading this to gain advice on how to spend your time in the clinic then I’m afraid that I have little to offer. While I’ve learnt an enormous amount in my time here, it has all been from spending time with the medics. Despite the massive amount of tropical medicine that you will be exposed to, the most important thing to come away with is insight – into the medics lives, into the problems facing refugees everywhere, into the horrific conditions in Burma and finally into yourself.”
V. GENERAL INFORMATION ON MAE SOT AND WORKING AT THE CLINIC

There are many excellent guides to Thailand, specifically Northern Thailand, such as Lonely Planet and it would be worthwhile purchasing one. But the following tips are also worthwhile keeping in mind!

Getting to Mae Sot from Bangkok

Bus

You can take a bus from Bangkok to Mae Sot, which leaves from the Northern Bus Terminal (Moh Chit). Buses leave early in the morning and late at night. It is approximately an 8 hour journey. The night buses arrive in Mae Sot between 4 and 5am so it is advisable to arrange to be collected by someone at your accommodation.

A taxi from the Airport to Moh Chit will cost around 500 Baht. You can get either a VIP bus, 1st or 2nd class ticket. All VIP, 1st & 2nd class buses have air-conditioning. Whereas the 1st & 2nd class buses sit more people, the VIP buses carry only 24, therefore each seat is bigger. At the time of writing, a one-way VIP ticket costs around 600 Baht and 400 Baht for the 1st class buses.

Plane

Mae Sot has an airport which is located very close to the clinic. There are flights available from Bangkok with Nok Air (www.nokair.com).

Visa

The length of stay and your country of citizenship will determine whether or not you will need to apply for a visa. For most countries, you will automatically receive a 30-day "visa on arrival" when you arrive in Thailand via an airport or 15-day "visa on arrival" if you arrive in Thailand by a land border crossing. Should you wish to obtain a 60-day tourist visa before you arrive in Thailand then you will need to apply at a Thai Embassy or Consulate. If you intend to be here longer than 2 months, you can apply for a two month "double entry tourist visa". Since the Mae Tao Clinic is not a legally recognised institution in Thailand, you must obtain a Tourist Visa and remember at all times that you are a tourist here. Under Thai law it is illegal for foreigners to work or volunteer without an appropriate permit.

Getting an Extension

You can purchase a visa extension from the Thai immigration office at Mae Sot for 1900 baht. This extension is for 7 days if you have a "visa on arrival (30 or 15 day visa)" or 30 days if you have a tourist visa obtained from the Thai Embassy in your home country. When this visa expires you will have to leave the country.

At the time of writing, the Thailand-Burma Friendship Bridge – the border in Mae Sot – has just reopened after being closed for over a year. It could close again at any time, so it is not a good idea to rely on this border as your only option should you need to do a “visa run”.

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**Visa run if the bridge is open:** This requires crossing the border into Myawaddy, Burma. You must be stamped out of Thailand on the Thai side of the bridge and walk across the bridge to Burma. There you need to fill in a form and pay the Burmese 500 Baht, or US$10. When you get to the Burma side, you must leave your passport with the office and are free to look around Myawaddy, but you will not be left alone. Many “guides” will offer to take you around to see the sights, at a price of course. As unpleasant as this might sound, many say that this is the best way to see Myawaddy, for it saves you from getting lost in the unbearable heat. You MUST be back on the Thai side before 5:00pm.

Both the Thai and the Burmese sides of the border are very used to tourists crossing for visa extensions. There are spies and “guides” on the bridge, so be careful of what you say to people. If asked, just say you are a tourist and want to spend more time in Thailand.

Check your stamp when you cross back to Thailand to know when your new visa expires. If you had another entry on your original tourist visa, any time left on that visa will cease and the new visa will start from the day you get your stamp. The extension given is 15 days.

**Visa run if the bridge is closed:** This means that to do a visa run to either get a new visa or activate your second entry (if you have a double entry visa), you will need to arrange travel to a second country. Many people choose to travel to Laos or Cambodia for this, both of which are not too difficult or expensive. Alternatively, you can cross into Burma at Mae Sai, near Chiang Rai. This is an 11-13 hour bus journey each way.

Note that when visiting the Friendship Bridge, whether it is open or closed, be aware that there are spies and guards in the area, so be careful of what you say to people. If asked, just say you are a tourist in Thailand.

**Money**

- There are many banks in Mae Sot and you are able to withdraw money from most ATMs with a debit card or credit card. Most ATMs have an English-language option.
- All banks with a currency exchange sign will exchange traveller’s checks for a small fee provided you present your passport as proof of identification. Without a work permit it is very difficult to open an account.
- There is a Western Union so it is possible to wire money should you need this service.

**Health**

- Check your immunisation requirements with your local Travel Health Clinic or General Practitioner.
- Malaria is not endemic in the town of Mae Sot itself. The clinic sees many cases but the patients come from across the border in Burma or outlying areas of Thailand. Most long-term volunteers do not take prophylaxis. However, the decision to take prophylaxis is up to you. If you intend to leave Mae Sot to travel to the surrounding National Parks or villages at the weekends you should consider taking prophylaxis, especially if you will be in Mae Sot in the rainy season.
Mae Sot General Hospital (055-531-229) is a state hospital and has a good reputation for sound medical care. It is very inexpensive by western standards, with adequate facilities and safe equipment. This is at the far end of town near the main NGO office strip. They are usually quite busy and some of the local staff can speak varying amounts of English.

It is strongly recommended that all medical placement volunteers bring their own anti-retroviral post-exposure prophylaxis in case of exposure to HIV as the clinic is not able to provide these.

Pharmacies

There are numerous pharmacies in the Mae Sot. Most pharmacy staff can understand small amounts of English and the generic drug names in English. Please keep in mind that just like in most Western countries, some drugs in Thailand need a doctor's prescription before it will be dispensed.

Personal Needs

In Mae Sot, there are supermarkets that sell most things that you may need, including toiletries, sanitary supplies and mosquito repellants; however, if you prefer specific brands, or have specific needs, it is recommended that you bring your own supply, as many items periodically become unavailable.

The Best Friend Library in town does have English books to lend but other than this there are limited English books that can be purchased in Mae Sot, so you may want to bring your own reading material. There are several cafes, restaurants and guest houses that have book exchanges.

Clothing

Light cotton, silk and airy clothing is more comfortable in the warm climate. Trousers and shirts should be loose fitting and it would be a bonus if they can be washed and dried easily, especially in the wet season.

If coming in December or January, the nights can get chilly and a jumper or cardigan may be needed.

Be aware that many foreigners that come to Mae Sot are unable to find clothing here that fits them, as the local population are generally smaller than many foreigners, so don't plan on buying the clothes you need for work etc. when you get here.

Singlet’s/tank tops (sleeveless tops that expose shoulders and chest), short shorts and skirts are not culturally acceptable whilst working at the clinic. Please wear loose t-shirts/blouses and shorts or skirts that come to at least your knees.

Clothing that exposes the chest, shoulders and thighs are considered culturally inappropriate at Mae Tao Clinic, and amongst the local community. It is very important to remember this, especially if you will be having contact with patients.
Shoes

☑ Sandals or slip-ons/flip-flops are the most appropriate as shoes are to be removed before entering any clinic, ward or the office at Mae Tao, as well as many other places in Thailand/Mae Sot (homes, temples etc.).

☑ When working in the Reproductive Inpatient, Medical Inpatient and Surgical Departments it is highly recommended to buy a pair of indoor sandals but there are communal sandals on the ward for staff use.

Public Transport (around town)

☑ Unlike virtually everywhere else in Thailand, there is not much in the way of public transport in Mae Sot. There are only a handful of Tuk Tuks, and those that you see around will not badger you for business as in bigger cities. There are, however, a lot of motorbike taxis that tend to wait around in groups for customers. Again, you will need to approach them if you want a ride. Most of the time there are one or two motorbike taxis waiting at the bus stop when a bus comes in. There are a lot of songtaos (pick-up trucks with bench seating in the back) in Mae Sot that go to and from the border and out to small villages nearby, but as with the tuk tuks, they are not necessarily easy to find. If you see one and want a ride, you will need to wave it down and tell the driver where you want to go, if he is going nearby, he'll give you a price, if he is not going in the direction you want, he will let you know.

☑ Nearly everyone uses push-bikes or a personal motorbike in Mae Sot, or a motorcycle. These are the easiest ways to get around. All guesthouses will have push-bikes you can rent, or it is easy enough to purchase your own.

Language

☑ While people in Mae Sot mainly use Thai to communicate, the people who work in Mae Tao Clinic mainly communicate in Burmese and Karen, as most of them are from Burma.

Accommodation

The clinic does not provide accommodation for foreign visitors. However, there is a wide range of accommodation available in Mae Sot at reasonable prices.

☑ Home Stay: There is currently a Home Stay (Home Stay “A”) managed as something between a guest house and a home. Set in a peaceful backstreet in Mae Sot, the house has cooking facilities, a garden, plenty of living room space and bicycles for rent. Best of all, 50% of the profits go to Mae Tao Clinic.

For bookings contact Sylvia or Mr. Rachen on: 01166 871745230
01166 871889422 or 01166 87210940 or email homestaymst@gmail.com

Room Rates: effective from 1st August 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Large rooms</th>
<th>Small rooms</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By day</td>
<td>400 Baht / room</td>
<td>300 Baht / room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By week</td>
<td>2,200 Baht for 1 person or 1,250 Baht each for 2-3 people</td>
<td>1,600 Baht for 1 person or 900 Baht each for 2 people</td>
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<tr>
<td>By month</td>
<td>6,000 Baht for 1 person or</td>
<td>5,500 Baht for 1 person or</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3,250 Baht each for 2-3 people</td>
<td>3,000 Baht each for 2 people</td>
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<td>More than 3-months</td>
<td>5,000 Baht for 1 person or</td>
<td>4,500 Baht for 1 person or</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2,750 Baht each for 2-3 people</td>
<td>2,500 Baht for each for 2</td>
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<td>people</td>
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**Bicycle for rent: for home stay guest only**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>By month</th>
<th>By week</th>
<th>By day</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary bike</td>
<td>500 Baht</td>
<td>250 Baht</td>
<td>50 Baht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain bike</td>
<td>1,000 Baht</td>
<td>500 Baht</td>
<td>100 Baht</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ban Thai Guesthouse**: Ban Thai has more than adequate rooms and well-tended gardens. If you are staying for an extended period of time you may be able to negotiate a lower rate. *(740 Intharakiri Rd, Mae Sot. T: +66 (055) 531 590, Email: banthai_mth@hotmail.com)*

**Bai Fern Guesthouse**: Located towards the centre of town this guest house has single rooms going for 150 Baht a night. *(660 Intharakiri Rd, Mae Sot. T: +66 (055) 533 343, www.bai-fern.com)*

**Phannu Guesthouse**: Located down the road from Bai Fern, this hotel/guesthouse has rooms with fans starting from 250 Baht a night. Most rooms have a television a private bathroom. *(T: +66 (081) 972 4467, +66(081)8862950, Email: phannuhouse@gmail.com, www.maesothotels.wordpress.com)*

**Baan Tung Guesthouse**: A very comfortable and friendly boutique guesthouse, located on the Mae Tao Clinic side of town, designed, built, and run by NGO-involved local couple. Monthly and long-term rates are available, determined on a case-by-case basis (availability, etc.) *(http://baantungguesthouse.com/ Phone: +66 05-553-3277, Email: baantungguesthouse@gmail.com)*

**Internet Facilities**

**Net 4 All**: There is an Internet shop very close to Ban Thai Guesthouse. It costs 15 Baht/hr. The computers are new and up to date with Word and Photoshop capabilities. The family that owns the shop is very nice and the husband is glad to help if you have any troubles but they don’t speak much English. They are open early in the morning and close at 11PM.

**There are many cafes and restaurants in town with Wi-Fi, and most guesthouses offer internet.**

**Restaurants and Food**

There is so much choice in Mae Sot that we are sure you will find your own favourite places to eat – the following are a guide. In addition there is an ever-changing array of street food on offer from various stalls. Hygiene standards are good and water is almost always treated. Tap water in Mae Sot is not drinkable.

**Aiya**: Aiya has great local Thai and Burmese food, with some Western dishes, at good prices and a friendly atmosphere. It is close to Ban Thai and the owners speak English, but be prepared to wait as each dish is cooked fresh and one at a time.
**Bai Fern:** Centrally located, this restaurant has good coffee, breakfast and Thai food. The prices are higher than most other restaurants.

**Khrua Canada:** Located on a side road across the street from the old police station is what most people know as Canadian Dave’s. The menu is extensive with lots of Thai and Western food and the food is worthy of a few or more visits. The coffee is organic, good and available for purchase. They also have a TV with Cable.

**SP Kitchen:** One of the best and one of the few restaurants that deliver, SP is good food and cheaper than Bai Fern. The menu is also extensive and serves lots of Western food, such as pizza, salads, pasta, and sandwiches. It is located on the Asia Highway but is sometimes worth going to as lots of foreigners eat here. It has a relaxed atmosphere with TV, lots of space and friendly staff.

**Day Market:** The large day market sells anything you might ever fancy, live animals, vegetables, fruit, tofu, coconut sticky rice, beans, meat, eggs, ice cream, refreshing drinks, flowers, and even insects. The market is open from about 6 AM to about 6 PM. It is best to arrive early for the freshest produce. There are plenty of Thai and Burmese dishes to choose from and Burmese style tea shops around. There is also a very large area in the middle of the market that sells clothes and every kind of household appliance.

**Night Market:** There are two night markets in Mae Sot, which sell only food. The night markets offer a cheap alternative to eating in a restaurant, for example, Pad Thai (Thai style noodles) is about 20-25 Baht depending on where you go. The main night market is located on the one-way road past the police station towards the roundabout, east of the centre of town. The markets run from 6PM to 11 or 12AM and mostly serve Thai and Chinese food. The other night market runs most Saturday nights and is located beside the Chinese Temple/old Police Station, near Canadian Dave’s.

**Hong Long Grocery Store:** This is where you can find many kinds of canned and packaged foods but they don’t sell any fresh fruit or vegetables. You will find Western comfort foods such as peanut butter, cereal, coffee, cookies and much more. Hong Long also carries toiletry items and some home goods. The stock is constantly changing, so Hong Long can make for an interesting store to visit at times.

**Hazel Café:** Similar to a Western coffee shop, this place has a comfortable atmosphere and free wireless internet. A wide variety of hot and cold beverages, cakes and other deserts are available. A popular meeting place for foreigners and young Thais, this café is located at the entrance to the “strip mall” about 150 meters from the police station.

**Casa Mia:** A restaurant with Thai, Burmese and Italian food (it has a near-identical menu to SP Kitchen). Positioned close to the clinic, it is a common gathering place for foreigners. The deserts are worthy of special mention as well. If one is coming down Inthara Khiri Road going in the direction towards downtown Mae Sot, look for Don Keung Street.

**Borderline:** A favorite among many volunteers and foreign NGO workers, Borderline offers excellent salads, tasty snacks, refreshing drinks as well as free wireless internet.
It also has a gift shop that sells products made by local organisations and communities. Often regarded as one of the best places to have a peaceful and relaxing afternoon, Borderline is a must visit. It is located 200 meters from where Inthara Khiri splits into two one-way streets. If going towards downtown Mae Sot on Inthara Khiri Road, stay on the left one-way street. Borderline will be on the left-hand side.

In addition these suggestions, there is an ever-changing array of street food on offer from various stalls.
**Sports and Recreation**

- Most afternoons (weather permitting), games of football, volleyball and ta-kro (a Thai sport you will very soon learn) are played. You are welcome to join in the afternoon festivities. Joining in these activities can help you get to know the clinic staff and assist in improving your communication with staff.

- Golf Driving Range: Located on Don Keung Street, about 100 meters from Casa Mia, this driving range offers an affordable activity for experienced golfers and novice players. For 30 baht, one can get a basket of golf balls. Also, one can rent golf clubs for 20 baht. It is open until 9 pm if one wishes to have an evening practice.

- The Centara Mae Sot Hill Resort Pool: You can either pay per day, 60 Baht, or pay per month, 500 Baht. To get there, it is best to get a Tuk Tuk and arrange for the driver to pick you up at your desired time. Once you know the way, you could venture to it on your own with the use of a bicycle or motorbike. The pool is clean and relaxing, especially necessary in Mae Sot during the months of April to June. Try to avoid, if at all possible, going on the weekends because it is overcrowded with families from town. Make sure you bring your own towel because the hotel will charge you 60 Baht for the pleasure of their towels. Also, as a guest of the pool, you receive a free soda or water but you have to ask for it.

- There is a local pool much closer to town than Centara, it is almost directly opposite the General Hospital, next to the 7/11 complex. It is attached to someone’s house, so you need to look in the large gate to ensure you have the right place (the pool is easily visible). There is a Burmese family that lives near the back of the pool that takes care of it. For just 30 baht you can swim as long as you like. Be aware that this pool is frequented by locals, so you may need to think about what you wear when swimming there, there are no set rules, so use your common sense at this pool.

**Security risks and precautions**

While Mae Sot is a relatively safe place for foreigners, it is important to remember that there are still some risks involved in being here. We recommend that you ensure you have comprehensive travel insurance for the duration of your time here.

- The most likely thing that you may experience as a foreigner is having your bag stolen from the basket of your bike – it is recommended that you only carry unimportant items in your basket (groceries etc.), as “drive-by” robberies do happen, unfortunately.

- It is unlikely to happen, but it is possible that armed conflict could break out on the border at any time, and this is something that you need to be aware of. There has been occasions when shelling has occurred in and around Mae Sot.

- Remember that it is illegal to work or volunteer in Thailand without the appropriate visa, and that if you are here on a tourist visa, you are a tourist at all times.

- There are numerous checkpoints around Mae Sot, so if you are travelling in or out of town, make sure you always take your passport with you. As a foreigner, you are not who the checkpoints are generally interested in, but remember, staff at the
checkpoints are police/government/army officials who are usually armed, so all interactions at checkpoints should be taken very seriously.

**Suggested Reading**

Mae Sot is an interesting and dynamic place that is constantly changing. It would be beneficial for you to read up on both Mae Sot and the situation on the border, as well as the history of Burma and its political and conflict issues to ensure you are clued-up on the problems faced by the Burmese communities here. You will find that the more you know about the situation before arriving, the more enriching you will find your experiences here.


- Jan Donkers & Minka Nijhuis - *Burma Behind the Mask*
- Shelby Tucker - *Burma - The curse of independence*, Pluto Press
- Various Contributors - *Strengthening civil society in Burma - Possibilities and dilemmas for International NGOs*, Silkworm Books
- Bells - *Lecture notes on Tropical Medicines*
- J. Crofton, N. Horne & F. Miller – *Clinical Tuberculosis*
- C.R. Schull – *Common Medical Problems in the Tropics*
- S.J. Yawalkar – *Leprosy for medical practitioners and paramedical workers*
- F. Savage King & A. Burgess – *Nutrition for developing countries*
- W. Peters & H. Giles – *Tropical medicine and Parasitology*
- P. Stanfiled – *Child health*
- D. Werner & B. Bower – *Helping health workers learn*
- T. Lankester – *Setting up community health programmes*
- M-T Feuerstein, *Poverty and Health*
- Backpack Team Report - *Chronic Emergency: Health & Human Rights in Eastern Burma*
In recognition of their dedication and vision, the Mae Sot Clinic, Dr Cynthia and the staff have won many awards from various groups and organisations across the world, including the following:

2011 Freedom to Create Leadership Award for Women (Freedom to Create Celebrations, South Africa)
2009 Alumni Association Humanitarian Award (UC Davis School of Medicine)
2009 Inspiration Model Award (from Thai TV programme "Khon Khon Khon")
2008 Catalonia International Prize along with Daw Aung Suu Kyi
2007 Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award (Taiwan Foundation for Democracy)
2007 World’s Children’s Prize for the Rights of the Child Honorary Award (Children’s World Association, Sweden)
2005 1,000 Women Nobel Peace Prize Nomination (Global)
2005 Unsung Heroes of Compassion Award (The Dalai Lama and Wisdom in Action, USA)
2005 The Eighth Global Concern for Human Life Award (Chou-Ta Kuan Foundation, Taiwan)
2005 Included in Time Magazine’s November Article on 18 Global Health Heroes
2002 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership (Philippines)
2001 Foundation for Human Rights in Asia Special Award (Japan)
2001 Van Hueven Goedhart Award (Netherlands)
1999 Jonathan Mann Health and Human Rights Award (USA)
1999 American Women’s Medical Association President’s Award (USA)
1999 John Humphries Freedom Award (Canada)

Websites

www.maetaoclinic.org
www.freeburmarangers.org
VI. APPLICATION CONTACT INFORMATION

If you are interested in volunteering your time at the Mae Tao Clinic please apply by sending the required documents to:

**Mae Tao Clinic**

P.O. Box 67  
Tel: +66 55 563 644

Mae Sot 63110  
Fax: +66 55 544 655

Tak Province  
E-mail: info@maetaoclinic.org

THAILAND

APPLICATION FOR PLACEMENT AT MAE TAO CLINIC

Please return by email, fax or mail, **Attention Eh Thwa:**

* A copy of your Curriculum Vitae
* Two letters of reference, one from a past medical supervisor
* A copy of your passport
* Your contact details, name, address and email
* An official transcript of your academic record to date (for medical students)
* Proposed date of arrival/departure (keep in mind minimum timeframe is 4 weeks)

**Reasons for coming to the Mae Tao Clinic**

Please answer the following questions:

1. Why do you want to be a volunteer/medical student at Mae Tao Clinic?
2. How did you hear about Mae Tao Clinic?
3. What are your expectations if you are invited to come here?
4. Are there any medical areas of particular interest to you?
5. Provide any further information in support of your application for a medical student placement.