



Norwegian and Thai Collaboration in Maritime Medicine

LCDR Thanawat Supanitayanon, M.D., M.M.H. (Maritime), M.Sc.*



Maritime sector plays an important role in Thailand's cultural background and is also regarded as a strong standing pillar supporting Thailand's economy and GDP. Thais are very much bonded to the sea and ocean. Civilisation has been developed through choice of living place, fishing, working, sailing, etc. being benefited from the sea and ocean.

The present globalisation has demanded all sectors to constantly make improvement in order to meet the standards recognised and accepted internationally. Until recently, a major reform in the fishery sector on the issues of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU), forced labour and human trafficking. Other problem areas consist of health concern, like in the classic Vitamin B1 deficiency of fishing crews in the southern part of Thailand. Such tragedy led to the energetic stimulation to find more efficient ways and means to improve the overall maritime sector.

Although all concerned agencies had put forth their effort and dedication through knowledge, resources as well as support on the issue, it is clear that Naval Medical Department of Royal Thai Navy, as medical professions, is in a very good position to exert their best contribution to help solve the problems in the maritime sector through its "Maritime Medicine Excellency" expertise. The medical professions shall not provide the "hard power", such as, gun fire power or law enforcement power; but they can definitely and effectively provide the "soft power" to the affected communities, such as, health prevention and support, health regulation, emergency medical services, including treatment of those who are at risk of getting sick or already sick at sea.

* Maritime Physician, Occupational Physician, Diving Medical Officer

Division of Underwater and Aviation Medicine, Naval Medical Department, Royal Thai Navy

Maritime medicine is considered as one of the newly established medical specialisations in the world. South-east Asia merely has a handful of maritime medicine specialists. It requires a great deal of effort from specialists who possess the rightful initiative mind coupled with a consistent support from other related bodies to be able to push forward and achieve the desired goals of this specific medical specialty. International support from experienced foreign countries, particularly, the Norwegian Centre for Maritime Medicine (NCMM) from Norway has been, step-by-step, cultivated through personal contact and strengthened into friendship, then developed into a more formal collaboration with Naval Medical Department of Royal Thai Navy. To make this valuable partnership in maritime medicine turn into a successful and glorious future, should all concerned parties generously give a full and solemn effort into building this medical specialised unit.



Naval Medical Department has been collaborated with many international bodies starting from its representative dealing with International Maritime Health Association (IMHA) to support the specialists from many countries in the first maritime medicine conference in Thailand during 26-28 March 2012. With great support from international specialists especially doctors from Norway, Thailand underwent a big leap of improvement for maritime medicine excellency in many aspects i.e. improved training and sending staff to attend the international conferences, setting up the Maritime Medicine Institute of Thailand as well as setting medical training standards for examining doctors on seafarers.



On November 11-12, 2015, Naval Medical Department (NMD) and Norwegian Centre for Maritime Medicine (NCMM) had arranged a conference on “To the future of Thai Maritime Medicine” at Montien Riverside Hotel and Naval Medical Department Club, with the initiation from Surgeon General, Vice Admiral Kanin Chumworatayee RTN, and Ambassador, Royal Embassy at Oslo, H.E.Mr.

Jukr Boon-Long. On the next day of November 13, 2015, the heads of both organisations held a meeting at Naval Medical Department and agreed on a bilateral memorandum of understanding in maritime and underwater medicine, which had been drafted and signed accordingly.



The purpose of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) was an establishment of collaboration on maritime and underwater medicine that enabled NMD and NCMM to benefit from the skills and resources available at both institutions in order to enhance their work in maritime health, and to promote both institutions to benefit from the collaboration. The core content of the MOU was that NCMM and NMD will collaborate on the training in maritime medicine, hyperbaric and underwater medicine for staff or responsible personnel and NCMM will be an official consultant to NMD in the establishment and development of maritime medicine fields in Thailand.

The MOU was drafted and reviewed bilaterally and approved for legal issues. Then, the team attending the signing ceremony, led by Rear Admiral Sophon Rattanasumawong RTN, Deputy Surgeon General, traveled to Norway to proceed with the official signing ceremony. While representative from Haukeland University Hospital, Department of Occupational Medicine, Norwegian Centre for Maritime Medicine, Mr.Eivind Hansen, the Chief Executive Officer of Haukeland University Hospital, was the head of the welcoming



team of NCMM. The visit was greatly welcomed by cheerful staff with great hospitality from the wonderful people of Norway. The ceremony was arranged in the stunning house named “Pleiestiftelsen for spedalske Nr. 1”, the house with long history of the doctor who discovered Leprosy and the house itself was once a Leprosy Hospital.

Although the ceremony looked simple, in fact, the whole event gave an impressive and glamorous perception for all attended. The MOU has a broad description of collaboration, hence, it was considered as a very important milestone on the progression and improvement of maritime medicine. MOU achievement is not the end, it is only the beginning. The things to come according to the MOU are the crucial steps that will need to be testified.

So many activities and movements came up after the MOU signing. Renowned lecturers from Norway are very actively participating in training and exchanging. More recently, Professor Eilif Dahl, came to Thailand with cruise ship “Azamara Journey”. He is one of very few specialists in cruise medicine in the world. He offered lecturing on topic “Cruise Medicine” session for Naval Medical Department staff, including residents from many other specialisation, i.e., maritime medicine, occupational medicine, and travel medicine. Such training at the department to those interested, was carried out at the instructor’s will at no cost. Moreover, Professor Eilif Dahl also invited 2 groups of the interested staff and residents to join the “Azamara Cruise Visit” during December 2016 and January 2017. This was surely a great starting point of opportunity opening for NMD’s staff to attain more knowledge and experience in broader aspects of maritime medicine.



Again, this is just the beginning. There will be many more exciting and promising collaboration in maritime medicine to come from within and from international collaboration like the one from Norway. It is neither an asset of someone nor the handful specialists in maritime and underwater medicine, but it will certainly be a valuable asset of people of Naval Medical Department and everyone who live and grow on this mother land. Only with pure-hearted determination, dedication and hard work from all levels of personnel could bring about the real success of establishing a firm and solid foothold of maritime medicine possible in Thailand.