



SUSTAINABILITY IS KEY

An impressive start to a new term, Assoc. Prof. Chanchai Sittipunt, M.D. has spelled out his plans for sustainability to ensure that the future of MDCU will shine bright throughout the years.

An interview with Assoc. Prof. Chanchai Sittipunt, M.D.
Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Chulalongkorn University

From a long line of excellence in medical education, the Faculty of Medicine at Chulalongkorn University (MDCU) in Bangkok, Thailand, has produced high quality medical graduates for 75 glorious years. All the while, forging new discoveries in health care and medical research has led up to the newest chapter in globalized medical training for the 21st century and beyond.

At the helm is MDCU's newly appointed Dean, Assoc. Prof. Chanchai Sittipunt, M.D. Here, we touched base with the visionary leader to talk about his bold approach to take on the great changes of health care needs of the future—and his plans to catapult MDCU to the next level.

SP: Congratulations on your new appointment to becoming the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Chulalongkorn University. How does it feel to be heading up Thailand's leading medical schools?

CS: Thank you. It feels like a normal day at work. I'm the same person as I've always been. Just ready to work and make our Faculty even better for everyone involved.

SP: That's great. You're one of those people who are very determined to get the job done. So, in this case, what is the first priority that you've got on the agenda?

CS: Well, we're continuing in the tradition of our previous Dean, Professor Suttipong Wacharasindhu, M.D. to promote leadership and health care excellence for the good of mankind and to keep reaching our global standard benchmarks.

SP: Can you please tell me more about your global standard benchmarks?

CS: Absolutely. We're focusing more on sustainability and the goals set forth by the UN Sustainable Development Goals. These include major pillars such as Society, Economy and the Environment. Of course, we are focused in the subsets of Health, Education, Inequity and Partnerships, to enable MDCU to both deepen and widen our ability to affect change in our society.

SP: That sounds like a big task. How will you get to your goals?

CS: It's definitely a huge undertaking but because I've got such a great team on both the Faculty and Hospital sides, we are coming together to promote the 5 P's, People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership. It's important that all of our stakeholders contribute to these in any way that they can.

SP: Can you give me some specific examples of how this will be executed?

CS: Sure. It's as simple as promoting more platforms for partnerships—to help seek out different organizations, domestic and international, that share our same goals to improve the quality of health care for all. It can even be seen in promoting our global experts in their respective fields to help shine the light



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Think
globally,
act locally.
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on new health innovations that are developed for the good of the society.

SP: When we're talking about the good of the society, how can MDCU contribute even more to help out our underserved populations in Thailand?

CS: That's a good question. MDCU is a research university that teaches. This means that we are always looking for new ways to add value to the medical and scientific communities.

SP: Has the COVID-19 Pandemic changed your approach to this concept?

CS: Actually, the pandemic has accelerated our need to constantly innovate and conduct research that will benefit the sick and disenfranchised health populations of the nation. We had the “WE CAN DO IT” attitude. It was not a forced initiative to develop our own COVID-19 vaccine or provide the nation with one of the first COVID-19 negative pressure wards. We were already doing research on bats in our Thai Red Cross Emerging Infectious Diseases Health Science Centre labs. It was very surreal because MDCU was in a way, one step ahead, of the curve because we had already been pursuing research and clinical advancements in this area prior to the pandemic. We found that our “WE CAN DO IT” attitude helped the nation. That's why we must continue to push our research initiatives in all fields to better equip ourselves for the next health care emergency.

SP: How has this “Can Do” attitude been applied to medical education? Are there applications to this concept in developing new medical graduates of the future?

CS: Indeed. Since the COVID-19 pandemic we've seen our commitment to sustainability in the form of identifying the Life-Long Learning

Process. It is a new style of medical education and the key to success in developing future leaders in any field, relies on our ability to be ready for changes. There will be less-formal teaching environments via new online learning platforms and learning applications to help everyone be able to upskill and reskill themselves.

SP: Wow. It seems like you're making major changes to the infrastructure of your organization. How does new-found flexibility benefit to MDCU?

CS: Really, we aren't changing much. We know what works and what can be enhanced to meet the challenges of tomorrow. So, in this case, we're excited because our new initiatives will help build more sustainable partnerships and empower all of our people.

SP: That is very important that the working and educational environment be a place that people can feel safe and grow. How do you intend to promote this to your organization?

CS: It's never easy to fulfill everyone's needs; however, when you empower them and give them room to grow and pursue their own goals, it is always a good investment. We care about our people and are dedicated to making MDCU a Happy Organization with high working and studying morale. We're all here because in some way, we all share the same mindset—that is, to help mankind and constantly push our limits.

SP: Inspiring answer. I'm afraid we've only got one more question left. What is the key to a successful future in global health care then?

CS: For sure, it's got to be the ability to conduct research and innovate. In this case, invention is not enough. That's why we've got our sights set on innovation—which I like to define as an invention that creates value for the society. So, whether it's an innovation for medical education in form of life-long learning platform or COVID-19 vaccination, we are committed to using our deep roots of over 75 years as the nation's leader in health care and research to add value to our great society.—S.P.