

Understand Major Barriers to Health Equity in Vietnam

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Introduction:

- Vietnam is a developing country with one of the fastest growing economy in Southeast Asia. Poverty rates, however, remain high in many parts of the country, especially in Northern mountains and central highlands where minority ethnic groups reside.
- There are 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam, each with its own language and culture. The Kinh people make up 87% of the population; the other 53 ethnic minorities scatter over mountainous areas.
- Vietnamese Americans are the third largest Asian American subgroups in Massachusetts. There are 11,376 Vietnamese in Boston and 5,061 Vietnamese in Worcester. Most of them immigrated from Vietnam.

Objectives:

- Improve medical Vietnamese, history taking and patient interviewing skills by having clinical immersion sessions at a major hospital in Ho Chi Minh city.
- Learn about different cultures of ethnic groups.
- Better understand socioeconomic determinants of health by interviewing people from different parts of the country.
- Determine important cultural factors to take into account when taking care of Vietnamese population here in America.

Clinical Exposures:



- Gia Dinh's People Hospital is located in Binh Thanh district, Ho Chi Minh city, receiving overwhelming numbers of patients from the city and nearby provinces.
- Interviewed patients and performed physical exams under directions of a physician.
- Shadowed physicians in gastroenterology division and intensive care unit.

Interviews:



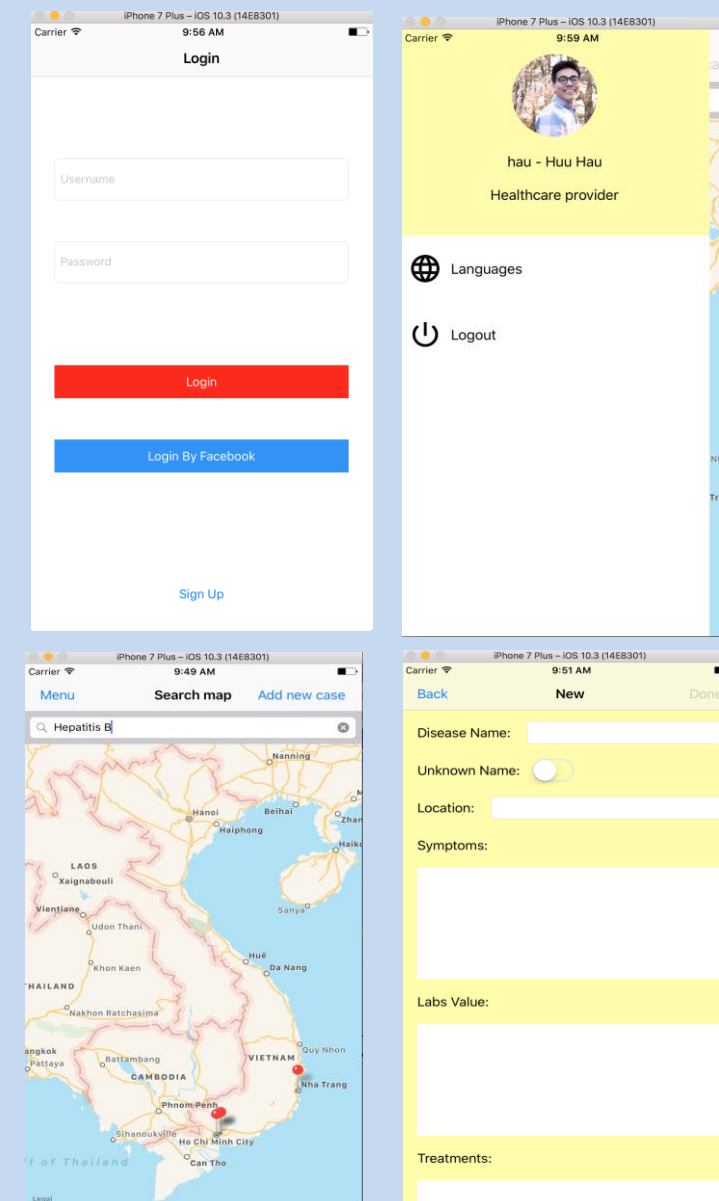
"My life depends on this river." —Minh, 40 years old, Can Tho.



"Primary care doc? What is that? No we don't have him here... There's a little medical station down the road for when we get ill, that's all.." —Minh, 15 years old, Bac Lieu.

"You see, those houses on that side of the river, when the rainy season comes, which is very soon around this time of the year, water invades their houses. Overnight you will see people climbing on top of the roof to stay dry... Yes the water is very dirty but people are used to it you know..." —36 years old lady selling fruits on a floating market, Can Tho.

Designing Healthcare App:



- Worked with an app developer to generate a health care app that was specifically designed for Vietnamese health care system.
- Goal of the project was NOT to produce a perfectly functional app but putting the idea out in Vietnam
- App's goals:
 - Help physicians better control infectious diseases.
 - Connect patient information from all over the country while protecting patient confidentiality
 - Allow patients to search for different generic versions of a brand name drugs and their locations.
 - Allow users to see what infectious diseases are prevalent at a specific location.



"We can take care of ourselves by picking medicine leaves..." H'mong lady, 84 years old, Mu Cang Chai.

Next Steps:

- Continue learning medical Vietnamese by interacting with Vietnamese here in Worcester.
- Apply what was learned about Vietnamese economic, culture and tradition when taking care of Vietnamese immigrants in a culturally competent manner.
- Provide information about primary care to recent Vietnamese immigrants since they are not familiar with this concept in Vietnam.
- Seek opportunities for the app to be further developed and modified by professionals in the field.

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