When I landed at the airport in Hanoi on Sunday November 18, 2007, my imagination was running wild with what I would experience over the course of my four week elective there. Everyone I'd spoken to since being offered the Hoc Mai Bursary who'd ever been to Vietnam, or ever known someone who'd been had given me their personal advice on what to expect; "the traffic is crazy," or "the food is amazing," and "the hospital will be an eye-opener." All of this turned out to be true, but nothing could have really prepared me for what lay ahead.

On Monday, I met with Dr Duong (the Hoc Mai co-ordinator in Hanoi), who introduced me to Dr Tu, my supervisor for my anaesthetics placement at Viet Duc Hospital – the major surgical hospital of Hanoi. Luckily Dr Tu spoke excellent English, as even with my phrasebook I was struggling!

Over the course of the month, I learnt about anaesthetics and critical care in a variety of settings, from the post-cardiothoracic surgery ICU to general ICU, day surgery, urology and neurosurgery to emergency surgery. All the doctors and nurses seemed to go out of their way to teach me, and I learnt a lot.

Vietnam has a horrendously high rate of traffic accidents, and until December 15 2007, wearing helmets was not enforced. As a result, there are high rates of head injuries presenting to the hospital, and these accounted for almost 15 out of the 16 general ICU patients at any one time.

The highlight for me clinically, was the night I spent with the night anaesthetics team in emergency theatres. We saw a lot of trauma cases, and I learnt about the anaesthetic management of patients with head injuries, (with a couple of hours sleep grabbed in the nurse's quarters before the next day!)

Aside from clinical work, I enjoyed English club with the Sydney Hoc Mai students and Dr Chinh – who I met when he visited the Rural Clinical School and North-West Regional Hospital in Burnie last year. I also became good friends with An, a Vietnamese 5$^{th}$ year medical student, and helped with the translation from Vietnamese to English of her report on "Evaluating the effect of alcohol consumption on severity and outcome from traumatic traffic accidents."

Overall I had an amazing and unforgettable four weeks in Hanoi. I am extremely grateful to the Hoc Mai Foundation for the opportunity, and I look forward to meeting the next group of Vietnamese doctors and students to continue the friendship between Vietnam and Australia.

Josephine Stringer

Year VI, University of Tasmania

Josephine and Dr Tu outside the anaesthetics department

Dr Chinh gives his presentation for English club