

2005 AAPHD Special Merit Award for Outstanding Achievement in Community Dentistry - International: Prathip Phantumvanit, DDS, MSc

Presented by Candace M. Jones, RDH, MPH

The AAPHD International Special Merit Award for Outstanding Achievement in Community Dentistry is presented to an individual in recognition of their contributions to public health dentistry outside of the United States. This year's recipient is Dr. Prathip Phantumvanit. Dr. Phantumvanit is well known nationally and internationally in dental research and dental public health circles. He is a basic scientist by training, but for over 20 years has been committed to transferring research to community application. He is a strong supporter of dental public health and has conducted research to improve oral health of the people in his native Thailand.

Dental caries is rampant in Thailand. In some parts of Thailand, extremely high levels of naturally occurring fluoride exist in the water supplies, which have resulted in advanced fluorosis to affected populations. Dr. Phantumvanit conducted early research on a method to defluoridate water supplies in villages. Residents were taught how to defluoridate their own home drinking water, and other local community members were trained to help monitor the necessary activities to ensure quality control. The drinking water, by the way, was not piped; rather, it was carried to households in huge pottery jugs. None of this was easy.

He has worked tirelessly for many years to fluoridate Bangkok, but opponents have been successful to date. He also has supported self-applied fluoride in schools using fluoride toothpaste and fluoride mouth rinse.

Dr. Phantumvanit was also instrumental in researching the Atraumatic Restorative Technique (ART) and promoted its use internationally and authored several articles that appeared in a special supplement



Left to right: Prathip Phantumvanit, Candace Jones

of the *Journal of Public Health Dentistry* in 1996.

He has been instrumental in bringing international dental public health leaders to Thailand to help increase the level of knowledge and expertise of Thai dentists. Most recently, he became dean of Thailand's crown jewel dental school at Thammasat University. He had a dream that has become a reality. Against a great deal of opposition, he initiated a dental school curriculum using 'problem-based learning,' an innovative approach which is more likely to be found in medical than dental schools. Further to his credit, Thammasat's students spend a large part of their six years of study in villages in Thailand, because that is where the people with dental problems live. In the villages students learn to address oral health needs on a community basis.

He also has been instrumental in ensuring that his faculty members receive advanced degrees in areas generally ignored. For example, he sent one faculty member to the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, to earn a PhD in health education because this type of training is sorely needed by his students.

Dr. Phantumvanit recently retired from his post as dean; however, he continues to work with his colleagues at Thammasat University Dental School and to consult for the World Health Organization on numerous projects.

In recognition of these contributions to public health and dentistry, I am pleased to present Dr. Phantumvanit with the 2005 Special Merit Award for Outstanding Achievement in Community Dentistry - International.

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