Fall 2026

# The Volunteer Connection

Health Volunteers Overseas

Knowledge shared. Lives saved.

## Nursing Education in Vietnam

# Looking Back and Moving Forward with HVO

*Three decades after a USAID grant brought her to Vietnam, Dr. Jill Derstine is still helping nursing students thrive.*

In 1992, HVO was awarded a grant by USAID for a national rehabilitation training project in Vietnam. This was well before relations between the U.S. and Vietnam were normalized by President Clinton in 1995, and the U.S. trade embargo, imposed in 1975, was still in effect until 1994, adding an additional layer of complication to the implementation of this grant. The grant was amended and extended numerous times, finally winding down in September 2007. The success of this project was the result of significant time commitment by numerous volunteers including (but not limited to) Jill Derstine, Elizabeth Kay, Marie O'Toole, Richard Fisher, Kim Dunleavy, Celia Pechak, Sharon DeMuth, and Hugh Watts.

For more background on this grant and the challenges HVO faced, visit our blog at: **hvousa.org/blog/license-to-trade**.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Marie O'Toole

Dr. Jill Derstine began volunteering with HVO over thirty years ago as a nurse specializing in rehabilitation. When HVO received the USAID grant, Dr. Derstine jumped at the chance to share her skills. "At the time, they had no rehab programs at all," she said. "There were soldiers from the war, and no one was taking care of them. I loved the work so much." Even after USAID funding ended, the project continued and is still thriving. At Hue University of Medicine and Pharmacy (HUMP), Dr. Derstine developed relationships with many of the nurses and physicians. "I was doing a rehabilitation workshop in Hue, and that's when I met Dr. Tran Duc Thai," she said. "The doctors were running the schools, and they didn't know a thing about nursing. There were no educated nurses, hardly any BSN programs. HVO started

> "It has been life changing to see the nursing schools become what they are now."
>
> **– Dr. Jill Derstine**

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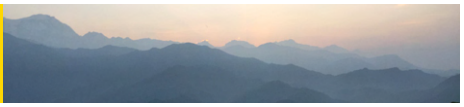
**7 Special Thanks** In remembrance & our supporters

**ALSO INSIDE**

**HVO's 2026 Photo Contest**

Share the moments that stay with you!

**Details on page 4** →



# Celebrating 40 Years Together



Dear friends,

This year, our fall Volunteer Connection marks 40 years of Health Volunteers Overseas. It's hard to capture four decades of shared purpose in a few pages, but the stories in this issue offer a glimpse of what those years have made possible. Again and again, we see that HVO's impact continues long after a volunteer returns home. Knowledge is shared. Relationships endure. Health professionals become teachers and mentors themselves, extending that knowledge to colleagues and the next generation. And patients benefit for years to come.

Throughout our anniversary year, we will share more stories from volunteers and partners, including reflections from our celebrations in Bhutan, Vietnam, and Tanzania. Together, they remind us that 40 years is more than a milestone, it is a testament to what sustained partnership can make possible.

Thank you for being part of HVO's first 40 years—and for helping us build what comes next.

Sincerely,

April Pinner, MSPH, RD
Executive Director

## KNOWLEDGE SHARED. LIVES SAVED.

*"The first month I started, we had a five-year-old girl who was referred from one of the southern hospitals. By the time she arrived, she was in acute kidney failure and required urgent dialysis. I met with my colleague in the ICU, and we were able to provide specialized treatment. This was only possible because of my training. She will turn six this year. She is going to school, going through life, following up at a nearby hospital. We saved her life by timely acute peritoneal dialysis. I did the dialysis myself and was teaching the nurses in the ICU step by step how to manage cases like hers. If the doctors and nurses are trained well, the impact will become even more exponential."*

**– Jimba Jatsho, MD,**
**Jigme Dorji National Referral Hospital**



# Looking Back and Moving Forward with HVO

*Continued from page 1*

sending volunteers to his nursing school to teach." Dr. Derstine and Dr. Thai have remained friends for decades, working closely to improve nursing education at HUMP.

Since the early 1990s, Dr. Derstine has seen nursing school enrollment roughly double as curricula advanced, and the nurses she works with have gained confidence. "Nurses were starting to speak out and effect change," she said. "They had never done that before. One nurse told me she had spoken up, and the doctor had acted on her advice. I thought, 'Wow. We did some good here.'" Dr. Derstine has seen patient outcomes, equipment, and clinical knowledge improve, and master's and doctoral nursing programs, nonexistent when she first arrived, have emerged. At HUMP, the department now hosts Zoom sessions so other hospitals can join HVO lectures. "HVO stands for excellence in clinical work to them," she said. "When they hear someone is from HVO, they pay attention."

Dr. Derstine enjoys hearing from the nurses and providing support from abroad. "One nurse saw photos I posted on Facebook and wrote me, 'I felt that I was back there with you. I remember how you would teach us and we would hang on every word.' That was probably thirty years ago. I was just being me. Just being me is helping people. That's the best part. My whole life I wanted to do something like this, and I did it. It has been life changing to see the nursing schools become what they are now."

> "My whole life I wanted to do something like this, and I did it."
>
> **– Dr. Jill Derstine**

## "As if by fate": Dr. Tran Duc Thai's perspective

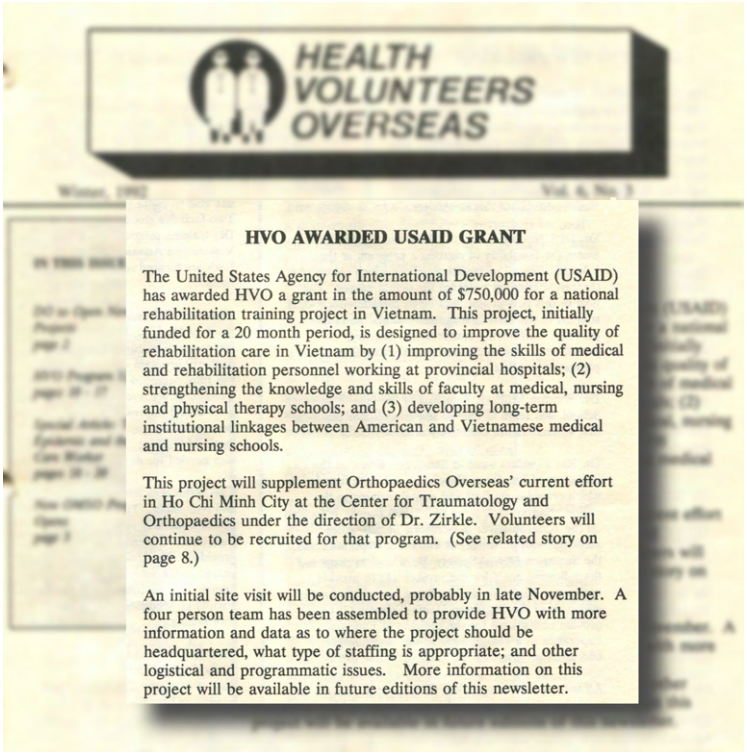


Photo courtesy of Dr. Marie O'Toole

"Back then, we were only two staff members. We were medical teachers, but we lacked any nursing experience…Everyone dedicated themselves to building a future for the nursing department. International cooperation needed to be prioritized. As if by fate, on a beautiful morning in early 2000, I went to the rehabilitation department of Hue Central Hospital for a medical examination of my patients. The head of the Rehabilitation Department introduced me to the volunteer rehabilitation experts from HVO. A collaboration was born and has continued to expand, with many nursing workshops and training sessions. I benefited greatly from these international collaborations, having the opportunity to visit and learn from many countries in the world. In 2005, a memorable occasion was a gift from HVO, with Professor Jill donating a projector. This was the first projector not only for the nursing faculty but also for the entire Hue University of Medicine and Pharmacy. The nursing faculty may not be grand or powerful, but that day everyone looked up to it, wanting to borrow the projector and hoping to have one like it.

I will always remember all of you. You will always be in my heart, in my life, and in the entire nursing faculty. I greatly admire Dr. Jill. Even though she is now 89 years old, she still returns to this place with love. We will always remember each other until the end of our lives. Thank you all!"

# From the Archives


HEALTH VOLUNTEERS OVERSEAS

**HVO AWARDED USAID GRANT**

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has awarded HVO a grant in the amount of $750,000 for a national rehabilitation training project in Vietnam. This project, initially funded for a 20 month period, is designed to improve the quality of rehabilitation care in Vietnam by (1) improving the skills of medical and rehabilitation personnel working at provincial hospitals; (2) strengthening the knowledge and skills of faculty at medical, nursing and physical therapy schools; and (3) developing long-term institutional linkages between American and Vietnamese medical and nursing schools.

This project will supplement Orthopaedics Overseas' current effort in Ho Chi Minh City at the Center for Traumatology and Orthopaedics under the direction of Dr. Zirkle. Volunteers will continue to be recruited for that program. (See related story on page 8.)

An initial site visit will be conducted, probably in late November. A four person team has been assembled to provide HVO with more information and data as to where the project should be headquartered, what type of staffing is appropriate; and other logistical and programmatic issues. More information on this project will be available in future editions of this newsletter.

## HVO Awarded USAID Grant

This article ran in the Winter 1992 issue of the HVO Volunteer Connection. The grant was the start of essential work in Vietnam that has evolved over decades. Thank you to our many volunteers and partners whose commitment to education and to each other have made so many advancements possible.

**SUBMIT YOUR MEMORIES BY DECEMBER 31, 2026**

# HVO's 2026 Photo Contest

We're inviting all HVO community members to submit photos that capture the spirit of your work: the teaching, the learning, the connection, the challenges, the small moments that stay with you. Winning photos will be featured on HVO's website and our social media and may be printed and displayed.

### Categories:

1

Teachers in Action

2

Friends in Healthcare

3

Beyond the Clinic

4

80s and 90s

5

Technology at Work

**To learn more, scan the QR code or visit our website.**

**hvousa.org/40th-anniversary-photo-contest**

# Voices of HVO

REAL PEOPLE
REAL PARTNERSHIPS
A HEALTHIER FUTURE



*"It's amazing what HVO can do over the long haul. Creating ongoing relationships can have incredible results over time that you may not foresee in the beginning but can only appreciate after many years."*

**– Yvonne Vaucher, MD**
*Project Director*




*"A baby or two or more may survive because you were physically there, but many, many more will survive when you share your knowledge."*

**– Ellen Milan, RNC-NIC**
*Project Director*



*"Experiences like these remind us of why we entered the field of medicine."*

**– Holly Brown, MD**
*Volunteer*

*"After HVO training, I started a center for children with disabilities in Kigali. Now, it has become a big center where more services will be offered to children. I really thank HVO for believing in me and supporting my professional activities."*

**– Ines Musabyemariya, BPT**
*On-Site Coordinator*



*"These HVO NICU nurses came by on safari, and they never turned back. Now we have this big team. At HVO you may think you are doing small things because you are a small organization. It will look small, just two people meeting, but see how big the program all of Uganda stemmed from that meeting. I am in Uganda but I am spreading out – from HVO, to Uganda, to Somalia, to Sudan. We shall soon cover the whole of Africa. All starting with two people."*

**– Margaret Nakakeeto, MD**
*On-Site Coordinator*

*"All this now, the work of 40 physiotherapists, I used to do on my own. Without HVO volunteers, I would have collapsed. I am really grateful for your friendship, your collaboration, supporting me all through this time."*

**– Sanga Dorj, PT**
*On-Site Coordinator*

*"Volunteering is not just a job, it is an adventure. Don't be surprised if you return with changed perspectives. In fact, expect it."*

**– Krzysztof Laudanski, MD**
*Volunteer*



*"Knowledge multiplies whenever you give it away."*

**– Daisy Alapat, MD**
*Project Director*

# Our Journey. Their Future.



40 years ago, the board of Orthopaedics Overseas voted to create HVO, starting with just orthopaedics and anesthesia. HVO has continued to expand, working hand in hand with local professionals to strengthen health care where it is needed most.



## 1986

HVO begins: 7 countries and 7 projects in 2 specialty areas



## 2001

The SEA-HVO Fellowship is established



## 2008

HVO expands to include hematology, hand surgery, and OB-GYN



## 2015

The Wyss Scholarship is established



## 2021

HVO debuts the Remote Education Interface



## 2023

April Pinner follows Nancy Kelly as Executive Director

## 1994

HVO expands to include rehabilitation, internal medicine, and pediatrics



## 2006

Dr. Louis Rafetto becomes HVO's 5,000th volunteer



## 2009

HVO expands to include oncology, pharmacy, emergency medicine, and mental health



## 2020

The Feinberg Fellowship is introduced



## 2022

Projects reopen following COVID-19 shutdowns.



## 2026

HVO serves 24 countries and maintains 120 projects in 19 specialty areas



# In Remembrance

## Kirsten Kristensen



Kirsten Kristensen was a physical therapist whose commitment to global health equity spanned three decades. She joined HVO in 1995, embarking on the first of eleven volunteer assignments across Peru, Bhutan, Malawi, India, Vietnam, and St. Lucia. Wherever she went, Ms. Kristensen shared her expertise generously, helping build lasting rehabilitation capacity in the communities she served. Her dedication and generosity to HVO leave behind a legacy that lives on in the rehabilitation specialists she trained and the patients they serve.

## Gaston Barnechea




Dr. Gaston Barnechea served as HVO on-site coordinator for the orthopaedics project in Lima, Peru, from 1990 to 2015. For 25 years, his marvelous personality and endless cheer made him a natural recruiter, drawing many volunteers to the project. He was dedicated to the medical education of orthopedic resident physicians and to the patients they served together. Colleagues remember him as someone who treated volunteers like family. It was an honor to work with him, and he will be deeply missed.

# Special Thanks

Thank you to the sponsors, foundations, partners, and Legacy Circle members who make our work possible.

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British Society for Haematology

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American Psychological Association
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Society for Education in Anesthesia
Society for Pediatric Dermatology

## HVO LEGACY CIRCLE

**A planned gift ensures that HVO will be able to continue to make important educational strides in the improvement of health care in resource-scarce countries.**

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Health Volunteers Overseas

Knowledge shared. Lives saved.

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# About Us

Health Volunteers Overseas is dedicated to improving the availability and quality of health care through the education, training, and professional development of the health workforce in resource-scarce countries. HVO designs and implements clinical training and education programs in child health, primary care, trauma and rehabilitation, essential surgical care, oral health, blood disorders and cancer, infectious disease, wound management, and nursing education.

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