

From The Editor

The first hybrid annual congress of the Royal College of Radiologists of Thailand and the Radiological Society of Thailand: How we live with COVID-19

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Thailand dropped its quarantine requirements for fully vaccinated international visitors in November 2021 to boost its battered economy which is heavily reliant on tourism. However, along with the renewal of tourism in Thailand, new COVID-19 infections have also begun to accelerate throughout the country. The rate of COVID-19 infection in Thailand rose from around 8,000 new cases a day in



the final week of January to more than 23,000 new cases a day in the final week of February, surpassing the record set on 13 August 2021. At the beginning of this year, more than 90% of COVID-19 infected patients suffered from Omicron, while the rest were infected with Delta until April when Omicron was expected to be 100% of the cause of the infection, according to the data from the

Department of Medical Sciences. Even though the rate of infection was higher than in 2021, the severe cases and deaths were tremendously lower and did not cause shortage in care provision in the hospitals. This has brought us a promising sign that COVID-19 will become an endemic within this year. Aligning with this possibility, from 1 March 2022 onwards, the Ministry of Public Health launched the out-patient treatment system for COVID-19 infected people who were previously healthy and whose symptoms were mild. If things go as planned,

COVID-19 will be classified as an endemic disease by 1 July 2022. Whether or not COVID-19 will be comparable to the flu, death rates from these 2 viruses need to be compared. Globally, according to the World Health Organization [1], the flu-related deaths which vary from 290, 000 to 650, 000 cases per year seem to be tremendously lower than those caused by COVID-19. Thailand's National Communicable Disease Committee agreed on 13 criteria which must be met before COVID-19 can be categorised as an endemic disease in Thailand; for instances, new COVID-19 infections must not exceed 10,000 a day, the mortality rate must be less than 0.1% of the infection rate, the hospitalisation must stay lower than 10% of the infection rate and higher than 80% of those at high risk of developing serious symptoms must have received at least two doses of vaccine and the general population must have developed sufficient immunity. On 1 April 2022, land border checkpoints between Malaysia and Thailand reopened after being closed for more than 2 years due to the pandemic and the number of arrivals at Suvarnabhumi airport was nearly double to 11,000-12,000 passengers per day since the cancellation of the pre-arrival RT-PCR test requirements, but still far from 200,000 passengers per day in 2019, before the pandemic. During the Songkran (water splashing) Festival, taking place on 13-15 April, the longest holiday and most dynamic event in Thailand in which workers return to their hometowns, the celebration was allowed under the condition of strictly adherence to VUCA which stands for Vaccine (V), Universal precaution (U), COVID-free setting (C), and Antigen-test kit (A). Because it has been predicted that there would be a spike in cases and death rates within 1-2 weeks after the Songkran Festival, many provinces are preparing for this worst case scenario as well as trying to meet those 13 criteria afterwards.

Tuberculosis (TB)) is one of the 5 most common respiratory diseases (after pneumonia, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and lung cancer) [2] and has always been one of the most fatal infectious diseases of the world and in ASEAN countries since the ancient time. This year (2022) is the right time to move the End TB project which is the national policy to meet sustainable development goals (SDGs) that should have initiated since 2021 but was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. To cope with these 2 fatal diseases which affect human health by destroying lungs, a chest radiograph was chosen for screening

for tuberculosis and assessing the lung condition in COVID-19 infected people. To avoid overcrowding in the hospitals, mobile units into the communities to perform chest radiographs and provide tests for diagnosis are the adopted and promoted in all community hospitals.



Mobile units from both public and private sections performing chest radiographs to screen for tuberculosis and assess the severity of COVID-19 infection in communities.

Given the improved pandemic situation, the Royal College of Radiologists of Thailand (RCRT) and the Radiological Society of Thailand (RST) held their first hybrid but 58th annual congress during 23-25 March 2022 at Icon Siam, the megamall on the east bank of the Chao Phraya river, Bangkok, under the government's VUCA policy. The JF Advance Med Company who funded the RadioVolunteer Project [3] hosted volunteers in its thank you dinner party cruise along the Chao Phraya River in the evening of 22 March. In addition to an exhibition of novel technologies, a presentation of upcoming knowledge and research, and social functions during the 3 days of the congress, two sessions of knowledge sharing on tuberculosis were arranged under collaborations between the Asian Oceanian School of Radiology (AOSOR), RCRT, RST, and FUJIFILM (Thailand) company to support the government's End Tuberculosis policy.



The atmosphere in the pre-congress evening of 22 March 2022. Clockwise from top: Alangka Cruise, on which the thank you dinner party to volunteer radiologists took place, in front of Icon Siam; editor among volunteer radiologists awaiting on board; editor with Mr. Kajohn Uamsiri, managing director of JF Advance Med Company; editor and Mr. Uamsiri with Mr.Sala Ubolchai, President of Thai Society of Radiological Technologists, and Associated Professor Manus Mongkolsuk, Dean of Faculty of Radiological Technology, Rangsit University; Mr. Adisorn Taprig, general manager of the JF Advance Med Company, among company staff.



The first day of 58th RCRT-RST annual congress. Clockwise from top left: Editor as the RCRT President and Chair of the congress with the former President (Associate Professor Permyos Kosolphan), RCRT-RST board of directors, and lecturers; Editor as the RCRT President with the former Presidents (Associate Professor Anchalee Churojana and Associate Professor Permyos Kosolphan), teachers, and recently graduated radiologists and fellows; Editor with Dr.Tawika Keawchur and Assistant Professor Warawut Sukkasem, as congress committee, and organizers visiting the exhibition.



Sessions on tuberculosis. Clockwise from top left: Editor as the RCRT President and Chair of the congress introduces the trendy VUCA concepts; Editor moderates a lunch symposium supported by FUJIFILM (Thailand) Company in which Dr. Phalin Kamolwat, Director of Bureau of Tuberculosis, presents the situation of tuberculosis in Thailand while Assistant Professor Narongpol Dumavibhat and Mr. Adisorn Taprig share points of views in their expertise; Associated Professor Nucharin Supakul moderates the RST-AOSOR conjoint session in which Dr. Ujita Masuo, Professor Soon Ho Yoon, and Associate Professor Li Fan share experiences and situations in their countries.

Thailand is one of the countries with the highest road traffic deaths. From 2020 to 2021, there were 34,788 road fatalities. With the rate of more than 35 per 100, 000 population means that there are more than 60 people a day or 2 people an hour killed by traffic accidents which is higher than the death rate from COVID-19. More than 95% of the deaths belonged motorcycle users and more than 60% occurred during nighttime [4]. Songkran Festival is so notorious for its 7 dangerous days in which people were more vulnerable to experiencing road accidents. At the time of writing, there were 1,917 traffic accidents, 1,869 injured people and 278 dead victims during the government's seven-day road safety campaign, five percent down from the figures reported annually in the past three years on average.

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