

## MEDIA STATEMENT

### Australian scholarship assists dedicated optometry student

**Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, 18 April, 2019:** Today a dedicated optometry student from Ho Chi Minh City will receive reward for her tenacious commitment to studying optometry. The scholarship is being granted by an Australian optometrist, Dr Tony Hanks OAM and his wife, Mrs Vicki Hanks, to Nguyen Lan Vien, who is in her third year, studying Optometry and Vision Science at the University of Medicine Phạm Ngọc Thạch.

Nguyen Lan Vien's life story has been one of struggle and determination supported by her hard-working mother. Lan Vien comes from poor farming family and was raised with her sister by their mother, who was the only source of income. In her own words she says, "Despite our great financial difficulty, my mother managed to raise my sister and I, and keep us both in school all the way from beginning to end. So my mother has been my main motivation for studying as well as in life, I am very grateful to her."

Next year in 2020, Nguyen Lan Vien will graduate and join the small, but growing, number of first generation Vietnamese-trained optometrists currently studying at University of Medicine Phạm Ngọc Thạch.

The optometry school is joint initiative between the University of Medicine Pham Ngoc Thach, the Ho Chi Minh City Eye Hospital and Brien Holden Vision Institute. It is the culmination of a long-term plan to introduce the optometry profession to the country, with the primary goal of alleviating the burden of uncorrected vision impairment in Vietnam outlined in the Vietnamese National Eye Health Plan.

Last year, 2018, was the inception of Vietnamese-trained optometrists graduating to become the first batch of locally trained eye care professionals to service the population of Vietnam and its unmet eye care needs.

Dr Tony Hanks and his wife Vicki, support the scholarship every year because the heart-felt gesture aligns with their common goal of further benefitting standards of eye care for patients no matter where they are. Dr Hanks, optometrist and former owner of Hanks Optometrists in NSW, Australia. spoke passionately on the topic.

"We are pleased to be able to provide this support to the optometry students of Vietnam because we have committed the last 45 years to benefitting our local community in Australia through the provision of quality eye care. We hope Nguyen Lan Vien will embrace the opportunity and use the support to help her achieve success in joining the emerging optometry profession in Vietnam," he said

Five years ago, Dr Hanks was at the launch of the first optometry school and the ceremony of welcoming the first enrolment of optometry students on their pioneering path for Vietnam. "I felt so proud that these enthusiastic young people would be joining our profession as colleagues. But I would like to clarify that they are not only "joining" it, but they are literally building the profession of optometry from the ground up. To describe them as inspiring is an understatement," he said.

Ms Ly Huynh, Country Representative for the Institute, "I believe optometry is pivotal to improving the eye health of the Vietnamese people. We are enormously grateful to Dr Tony Hanks and Mrs Vicki Hanks for all their on-going support and generosity to our optometry students. Optometry is a developing profession with great potential to create much needed change in Vietnam and today we celebrate international support for one of our future ambassadors."