School life at Sirindhorn School of Prosthetics and Orthotics, Mahidol University

My name is Samuel Mkomera. I am a Certified prosthetist and orthotist with a bachelor's degree in prosthetics and orthotics obtained at Sirindhorn School of Prosthetics and orthotics (SSPO), Mahidol University, Thailand. My career as prosthetist and orthotist started seven years ago when 500miles sponsored me to obtain a diploma in prosthetics and orthotics at Cambodian School of Prosthetics and Orthotics in Cambodia. After graduating in February 2020, I worked as an associate prosthetist and orthotist for two years at 500miles prosthetics and orthotics center. In 2022, I was offered another precious opportunity to upgrade to a bachelor's degree at SSPO, Mahidol University in Thailand.

Sirindhorn School of prosthetics and Orthotics is under Mahidol University located in Thailand, south-east Asia. Since its opening, it has graduated students from different countries including Malawi to be professionals in prosthetics and orthotics. In addition to four years of traditional and internation programs, the school also offers 2 years upgrading program.

The 2 years upgrading program mostly focus on the courses that are not fully included in the diploma program. These courses include spinal orthotics, upper limb prosthetics, Cranial orthotics, transfemoral prosthetics, statistics, research process, wheelchair training and sitting orthosis. In addition, the school also offers introductory subjects like physics, chemistry, biology, and innovation and creativity. The school also introduces Thai language classes to foreign student to acquire basic communication with local people and patients.

The whole journey at SSPO begins on 8th August 2022. I was one of two students shortlisted for 2022-2023 academic year. Unfortunately, my colleague withdrew before starting the course, that made me study some subjects alone. I thought it would be hard at the beginning, but I really appreciate the support I got from SSPO education team.

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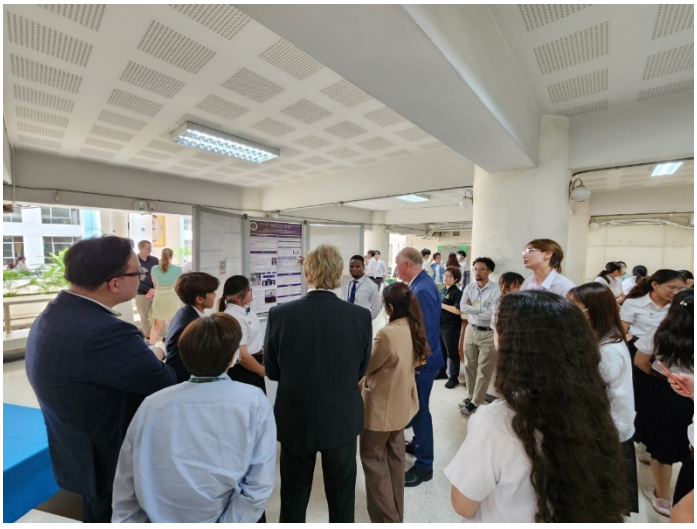
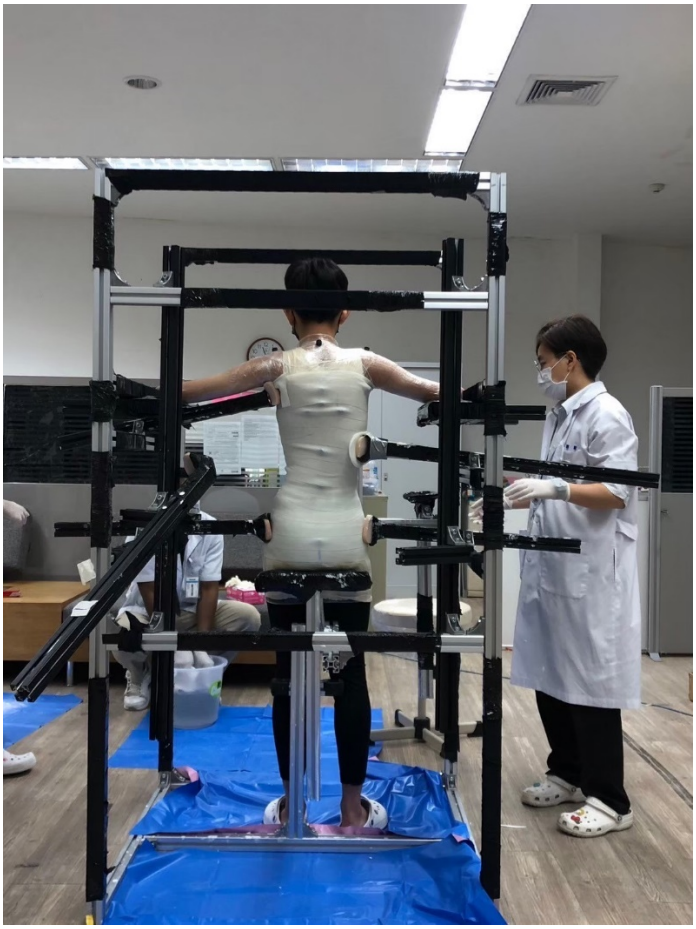
In the first year, I enjoyed studying with students taking different courses at the University. Since Mahidol University has many campuses, I was traveling to have classes at those campuses every day. That made studying more exciting since it was also giving me an opportunity to explore different places. In addition to studying, I enjoyed interaction with both local and international students. At the end of the first semester, the school organized trip where we had a chance to explore some parts of Northern Thailand.

In the second year, we had a lot of practical subjects including wheelchair training and upper limb prosthetics, cranial orthosis, and transfer transfemoral prosthesis. At the end of each subject, we were given a topic to prepare and do a presentation in a group of two or three students. That helped me to boost my presentation skills.

We also had two clinical placements. The first placement was in the first semester of the second year. I did it at SNMRI clinic situated in Nonthaburi, the city next to Bangkok. SNMRI is known as a busiest clinic in Thailand. On average, 10 to 20 patients are seen every day, and they have many complicated cases. In this placement I learned how to prioritize the patients despite being busy. I also practiced different types of insoles and footwear for different foot pathologies including diabetes. I took the second clinical placement at SSPO clinic. This clinic is under Siriraj hospital, the biggest hospital in Thailand. In this clinic I had a chance to work with a full multidisciplinary team including orthopedic doctors, nurses, and physiotherapists. I also had a chance to join diabetes and neuromuscular clinics.

At SSPO we're also trained in how to conduct scientific research. The school has nice research facilities and well-trained research staff. We are requested to form groups of three to four students and select a research topic based on our interest. My group had four students and we did a pilot study titled "Effectiveness of three-dimensional assisted casting apparatus for adolescent idiopathic scoliosis". A three-dimensional assisted casting apparatus was developed by one of PhD students at SSPO to simplify the work we usually have during casting and fabrication of scoliosis spinal braces. The apparatus was designed with force pads that can be adjusted to fit different patients. The force pads are manipulated on the patient's body to correct the spinal deformities during casting. Our group was interested in studying its effectiveness with the aim to find any possibility that it can be used instead of casting using hands. We had a wonderful presentation of our research study on 3rd April 2024.





The part that I like most about studying at SSPO is that they encourage the use of outcome measures. Before delivery of any device, we were trained to include the outcome measure that helps to improve the quality and acceptance of the devices by the patients.

SSPO organized that students should have advisory meetings twice per semester. Two or three lectures are allocated to a particular group of students where they discuss any educational and social problems faced by students and provide constructive advice, encouragements, and any information necessary to help students succeed

In addition to studies, I enjoyed exploring different places in Thailand where I had opportunities to interact with both locals and internationals. Thailand is known for its warm welcoming to the foreigners. It has nice food, interesting culture, and kindhearted people.

Lastly, we had a farewell party on our final week at SSPO. It was amazing, created with great memories that may never end.

Thank you 500miles for the support on sponsoring me to pursue a bachelor's degree in prosthetics and orthotics. I promise to use the knowledge and skills gained to fully support our P and O services in Malawi.