



Phongsaly villagers get free health check-ups

Over 3,800 people in the remote districts of Mai, Samphan and Bountai in Phongsaly province received free dental care, eye checks, ear, nose and throat (ENT) examinations, along with general health check-ups recently. The services were provided by a team of doctors from the United States and Oudomxay and Bokeo provincial hospitals, according to the Oudomxay provincial hospital's Eye Unit.

The check-ups took place from February 3-11 with the collaboration of the Lao Rehabilitation Foundation (LRF) and the provincial authorities. The services, funded by the LRF at a total cost of US\$51,000, were provided with support from the United States' Lao Rehabilitation Foundation.

The aim of the project was to prevent dental cavities and deafness, help prevent the deaths of mothers and their infants, improve health education in oral hygiene and ENT care, and to provide services for expectant mothers and pediatric care.

Despite the doctors' work, there are still many people in remote areas of the country in need of assistance, suffering from oral, ear, nose, throat and eye diseases, the Eye Unit's ophthalmologist Dr Phetsamone Indara told *Vientiane Times* yesterday. "Many of these conditions could easily be prevented and treated if education and the right equipment were available in each district," he said.

The main causes of infant mortality are breech and transverse presentations in pregnancy, which should be followed up at the provincial and district hospitals. However for the majority of people limited funds and lack of awareness are the main obstacles to accessing healthcare but

distance, limited access to hospitals and the fact that many people cannot afford to travel to provincial hospitals remain major challenges.

Cavities and deafness are pressing public health problems and the healthcare of expectant mothers and children is a priority for the Ministry of Health. Unfortunately, many other people in remote areas are still waiting for better healthcare services, Dr Phetsamone said.

To help the people of Phongsaly province, especially in the target districts, LRF President Dr Luc Janssens also provided medicines and aural and dental equipment to the three district hospitals and dispensaries to use in their daily work. The programme began in 2008 and so far more than 20,000 people from the Northern provinces have received health check-ups. The mission operates without discrimination regarding gender, age, ethnicity or religion.

Health services will be provided in La, Baeng, Houn and Pakbaeng districts of Oudomxay province in February next year, according to the Eye Unit.

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