



More rural Oudomxay villagers get free health checks

Over 1,500 people in remote areas of Nga district in Oudomxay province recently received free dental, ear, nose and throat (ENT) and eye examinations, along with general health checks. The check-ups took place at a healthcare centre in Naxan village recently with the support of the United States' Lao Rehabilitation Foundation (LRF) and the Fred Hollows Foundation of Australia at a cost of about US\$12,940 (over 100 million kip).

The LRF's Coordinator Dr. Phetsamone Indara said the services were provided by a team of doctors from Oudomxay provincial and district hospitals. The aim of the project was to prevent dental cavities and deafness, help prevent unnecessary deaths of mothers and infants, improve health education in oral hygiene and ENT care, and provide information for expectant mothers.

Despite the doctors' work, there were still many people with oral, ear, nose, throat and eye ailments in remote areas of Laos in need of assistance, the ophthalmologist Dr. Phetsamone told *Vientiane Times* this week. "Many of these conditions are easily preventable and can be treated if education and the right equipment were available in each district," he said. The main causes of infant mortality are breach and transverse presentations in pregnancy, which should be followed up at the provincial hospital.

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 were still waiting for better healthcare services, Dr. Phetsamone said.

To help the people of Oudomxay province, the Lao Rehabilitation Foundation also provided medicine and medical equipment, including a nebulizer, ultrasonic doppler, small surgery set, delivery set, autoclave, otoscope, sphygmomanometers and other items for the dispensary to use and improve community healthcare.

The programme began in 2008 and so far more than 42,000 people from the Northern provinces have received health checks. The mission operates without discrimination regarding gender, age, ethnicity or religion. Similar health services would also be provided to people in other areas in the near future, according to LRF.

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