

Doctors urge iodine use to prevent goiter

Provincial medical staff is promoting iodine consumption to prevent goiter, a condition that is on the rise in Oudomxay province.

Provincial Hospital Deputy Director, Dr Douang Ketleuangsy, said yesterday that more than 20 people suffering from goiter had registered for free surgery with US-based Lao Rehabilitation Foundation (LRF) during a weeklong visit by doctors to the province this month.

However, the blood testing machine at the hospital malfunctioned and goiter surgeries had to be cancelled. The US surgeons have limited their surgeries to cleft lip and cleft palate and returned home.

“Even though people were not able to undergo surgery, we realized during the visit that the number of people suffering from goiter has significantly increased,” Dr Douang said.

The number of people with goiter recorded did not include those from around the province or from local communities who did not come to the hospital after they received news of surgery cancellation.

Dr Douang said medical staff is bolstering efforts to promote consumption of iodine to prevent goiter. Though such a program has been in place for several years, further public education is needed.

For example, iodized salt is a good source of iodine, a micronutrient necessary to prevent the condition. However, salt should not be stored in humid, hot conditions because the effectiveness of iodine is reduced. Seafood is another source.

More than 90 percent of those who receive surgery to treat goiter will not experience reoccurrence. However, the expense is significant.

Dr Douang estimates the cost of goiter surgery is at least two million kip per case depending on the difficulty of the surgery. At present the hospital is treating the condition among people aged 20 to 50.

Oudomxay hospital has a policy to treat all people regardless of their ability to pay. The state social security organization and community health assurance fund is responsible, and the Asian Development Bank also provides funding.

However, prevention remains the best option for treatment. “Eating salt or food containing iodine at the youngest possible age is the best way to prevent goiter,” Dr Douang said.

**By Xayxana Leukai
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