



Medical team gives twins new vision in life

Seven-month-old twins born with congenital cataracts have undergone corrective surgery performed by medical teams from hospitals in Vientiane and Bokeo and Oudomxay provinces.

The twins, named Samlan and Sintham, were born in Hadnam village, Pha-oudom district, Bokeo province, and underwent the surgery on June 15 at Bokeo provincial hospital.

The operating team included ophthalmologists and anaesthetists. The treatment of twins for this condition was the first such case for the team during the seven years they have been carrying out their humanitarian mission.

The surgery was supported by the Fred Hollows Foundation of Australia and cost 14 million kip.

An ophthalmologist from Oudomxay province, Dr Phetsamone Indara, told *Vientiane Times* this week the team took two hours to remove the cataracts and the procedure was successful. "If they hadn't had this operation, the twins would have suffered from poor vision later on in life."

Dr Phetsamone said the twins have now returned home and are being taken care of by their parents. "Our team plans to treat the twins again when they are two years old by inserting intra-ocular lenses," he added.

“We hope our current mission has improved the sight of people with cataracts in Bokeo and the northern provinces as a whole,” Dr Phetsamone said. “It will improve people's lives in the future, especially for the children and teenagers we have operated on.”

Over the years, the medical team has treated and performed surgery on thousands of patients with sight problems, disfiguring injuries and facial defects.

Medical staff from Bokeo provincial hospital together with the ophthalmology team from Oudomxay province, the Lao Rehabilitation Foundation (LRF) and the Fred Hollows Foundation carried out cataract operations and plastic surgery to treat poor vision, cleft lip/cleft palate, and burn and traumatic scars, as well as treating minor eye problems. The mission also aimed to broaden health service coverage for people in remote areas, ethnic groups and the urban poor.

In addition, US plastic surgeons and anaesthesiologists from LRF conducted training to improve the skills of their counterparts in Bokeo province.

Duties were divided between the three cooperating organisations to implement the project successfully. Bokeo provincial hospital was responsible for informing local people about the project and for patient registration.

LRF covered the cost of the medical team's transportation and surgery, hospitalisation and transportation expenses for poor patients, and glasses and medical prescriptions. The Fred Hollows Foundation paid for the medicines used by eye patients and the cost of cataract surgery.

The programme began in 2008 and so far more than 20,000 people in the northern provinces have received health check-ups. The mission operates without discrimination regarding gender, age, ethnicity or religion.

**By Phaisythong Chandara
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