



The Vietnam War and the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s left millions of Cambodians dead or traumatized, families torn apart, and a vibrant culture nearly destroyed. By 1979, fewer than 50 physicians remained alive and were tasked with caring for a country burdened by infectious diseases, malnutrition, psychological trauma, and poverty. Today Cambodia ranks among the lowest countries on the human development index and among the highest in poverty. Disparities in healthcare access are great – particularly in rural areas where 80% of the population resides and 40 % live well below the poverty threshold.

An Award-winning Extension of Partners HealthCare

Operation Village Health is a project of the Center for Connected Health, Partners HealthCare. Through collaboration with Sihanouk Hospital Center of HOPE and the non-profit organization American Assistance for Cambodia, this innovative project is building local health care capacity in remote regions of Cambodia. Since 2001, Operation Village Health has enabled Harvard-affiliated physicians in the Partners HealthCare system to support care delivery at a health center in the remote village of Rovieng. In 2003, the program expanded to include a referral hospital in the town of Banlung, the provincial capital of Rattanakiri province. At each site point-of-care clinical data (e.g. medical history, physical exam, labs, and relevant digital images) are gathered by Cambodian clinicians and sent via email to volunteer physicians in Boston and in Phnom Penh for review. Within hours recommendations are returned, empowering local providers to deliver improved care. Since inception, over 900 patient encounters have been completed.

Reviews of this program have demonstrated a clinical benefit, high levels of patient satisfaction and a decreasing need to transfer patients to distant facilities. In addition, a set of five basic point-of-care laboratory tests (known as Lab-In-A-Box) was introduced in 2004 and has enabled quicker, more accurate diagnoses, and a decreased the need for more expensive offsite testing.

As a result of this positive impact, Operation Village Health was chosen from a multi-national field of nearly 100 projects as the 2006 winner in the health category of the Stockholm Challenge - an international forum recognizing technological innovations that improve the lives of those in the developing world.

Future Directions

With continued support, the introduction of a more robust information management system is anticipated. This is likely to include a disease registry for population-based health tracking, a web-based electronic medical record to facilitate improved continuity of care, and the piloting of a new tool for clinical documentation that uses digital pen and paper technology to increase efficiency and minimize the need for time-intensive keyboard transcription. In addition, a more focused educational component is being planned and developed.

Overall, Operation Village Health seeks to demonstrate a model of care that uses communications technology to overcome differences in time zones, socioeconomic strata, and cultural practices and enable improved local care for those in the developing world.

For more information, or to support this program, contact Operation Village Health Project Leader, Dr. Paul Heinzelmann at pheinzelmann@partners.org or 617-726-2552.