

## Increasing number of children treated for cancer of the blood



Dr Sommanikhone Phangmanixay.

### Times Reporters

Almost 100 children suffering from cancer have sought treatment at the Children's Hospital in Vientiane since it opened in 2011.

Hospital Director Dr Sommanikhone Phangmanixay told *Vientiane Times* last week that leukemia and other cancers linked to blood cells are the most common diseases being treated. Patients also suffer from cancer of the eye, kidney and bone. "We have observed that the number of children coming for treatment for cancer is on the rise compared to a few years ago," she said.

Dr Sommanikhone says the high number of cases is taxing the hospital's capacity. They now employ two Lao doctors specialising in the treatment of cancer.

"These doctors can make correct diagnoses for cancer patients at every step," she said. Patients do not pay for treatment at the hospital as the bills are covered by a South Korean project. The project also pays for meals for parents who stay with their children during treatment. Most forms of cancer are treated by chemotherapy.

Dr Sommanikhone said it was important to closely monitor and care for patients during treatment. For example, the care-taker is advised to clean any wounds or swollen parts of the body to avoid infection. Some parents do not understand the importance of keeping wounds clean.

"Some children have died from an infection rather than dying of cancer," she added.

The Children's Hospital has four cancer wards, up from

only one when it opened six years ago. Cancer is a class of diseases characterised by out-of-control cell growth. There are over 100 different types of cancer, and each is classified by the type of cell that is initially affected.

Cancer harms the body when altered cells divide uncontrollably to form lumps or masses of tissue called tumours (except in the case of leukemia where cancer prohibits normal blood function by abnormal cell division in the blood stream).

Tumours can grow and interfere with the digestive, nervous, and circulatory systems, and they can release hormones that alter body function. Tumours that stay in one spot and demonstrate limited growth are generally considered to be benign.

According to the American Cancer Society, cancer is the second most common cause of death in the US and accounts for nearly 1 of every 4 deaths.

The World Health Organisation estimates that, worldwide, there were 14 million new cancer cases and 8.2 million cancer-related deaths in 2012.

## Mahosot administrators scrub up on hospital management

### Phetphoxay Sengpaseuth

Administrators of Mahosot Hospital in Vientiane held a workshop on Friday to discuss improvements to health services and the overall management of the hospital.

While the hospital is undergoing a major upgrade, health administrators have an important role to play in management to ensure the facility can offer high-quality healthcare to patients, the workshop heard.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Director General of Mahosot Hospital, Assoc. Prof. Dr Bounthapany Bounxouei, said the workshop under the Swiss Laos Hospital Project is important in the development and improvement of the health sector.

He said even though hospital facilities were being upgraded to international standards, if administrators lacked knowledge about management, it would be difficult to provide improved healthcare.

During the workshop, participants learned about a framework of corporate culture, hospital vision, hospital strategy and strategic planning, leadership, good

governance, financial management, and human resource management.

One major aim is to encourage doctors and nurses to work at the hospital by providing better conditions, higher salaries, and overseas training courses.

The improvements at the hospital were part of the government's wish to transform it into a modern facility next year. "We aim to upgrade the hospital to international standards," Dr Bounthapany said.

Doctors expect that the services provided will be of a similar level to those at private

hospitals in neighbouring countries.

So far, the hospital has carried out part of its strategic plan, including constructing new buildings, improving service standards, training medical staff, and building a parking lot.

A hospital management consultant from Switzerland, Dr Alphons Schnyder, said the hospital also manages a budget dedicated to buying new equipment to upgrade the standards of medical service.

He said one major difficulty is the management of doctors' time, as they not only treat patients but also

train and teach at various institutions and healthcare centres across the country.

In addition, the hospital has other problems that need to be solved, particularly the shortage of nurses needed to provide the daily services required at the upgraded facilities, he said.

Additionally, hospital staff should focus more on medical ethics in a bid to reduce the number of public complaints about the services provided.

The objective of the hospital's upgrade is to reduce the number of people seeking treatment in neighbouring countries.



Dr Bounthapany Bounxouei (fifth left) with hospital administrators and advisors.

## Govt raises poverty...

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poverty.

To stay above the poverty line, a person must have food that provides at least 2,100 kilocalories a day along with clothing and a permanent residential shelter.

A person must also be able to afford his or her own healthcare when ill, and have access to basic education and other basic public services.

The eight-page decree No. 348 defines six criteria that a family must meet in order to be declared poverty-free.

The criteria are as follows: having a permanent and safe residential shelter, having necessary assets and equipment for daily use and making a living, family members having secure jobs and income, school-aged children in a family enrolled in lower secondary school, access to clean water and electricity, and access to basic

healthcare.

The 2013 Prime Ministerial Decree stipulated that, on average, a person earning 192,000 kip a month is above the poverty line. In rural areas, a person earning 180,000 kip a month is classified as being above the poverty line, while a person living in a town should make 240,000 kip a month in order to stay above the poverty line, according to the 2013 Prime Ministerial Decree.

Mr Kongkeo admitted that the poverty rate in Laos, such as the number of poor families, might now increase slightly because the poverty standards had been raised.

"But there won't be much change. We have experimented using the new poverty lines in 100 targeted villages in four or five provinces and it was found that there was only a minor

increase," he said.

The decree also raises the standards that villages and districts have to fulfil in order to be declared poverty-free.

Eight criteria are defined for a village to be poverty-free including having poverty-free families as 70 percent of all families, an increase from just 51 percent set in the 2013 decree.

The village must also have or have access to a primary or secondary school, have or have access to a dispensary or basic healthcare service, clean water, year-round road transport, telecommunications and transport services, electricity, and a market.

Nine criteria are set for a district to be classified as poverty-free. They include a district having poverty-free villages as 71 percent of all villages, an increase from the 51 percent stated in the 2013

decree.

The district must also have a secondary school, district hospital or access to provincial or central hospital, a water supply system in the main town, and access to roads, telecommunications, and other public services.

With the poverty line raised, officials in charge of poverty reduction said the government needed to work harder to realise Laos' goal to graduate from poverty in 2020.

The government has set a target to raise 4,833 families above the poverty line next year, according to the Socio-economic Development Project for 2018.

If achieved, this would lower the number of poor families to 66,139, accounting for 5.67 percent of all families nationwide.

The government will also strive to raise 220 villages above the poverty line, reducing the number to 1,291,

accounting for 15.10 percent of the total.

Another target is to raise two more districts above the poverty line, lowering the number to 21, accounting for 14.18 percent of the total.

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