

## Swiss Laos Hospital Project: Annual Report 2021

The purpose of the Swiss Laos Hospital Project is to provide humanitarian, medical and financial support to hospitals, doctors and medical staff as well as patients in Laos.

Our activities in the year under review were severely restricted by the Corona pandemic. Temporary assignments of volunteers from Switzerland were impossible. Only Regine Wehrle (until August) and Gabriele Grossenbacher were able to work in Vientiane and to represent our cause competently and effectively on the spot.

They maintained direct contact with our partners in Laos, disbursed grants, and monitored ongoing projects as well as our emergency relief efforts.

We carried out our mission to provide continuing education and training for medical personnel in Laos primarily via video conferences. These were increasingly well attended.

In addition to ongoing projects, we provided financial support primarily for the procurement of medicines and daily necessities that were in short supply due to the pandemic. By doing so, we were able to help the hospitals maintain their functions even under the difficult conditions.

### Association

#### Board of Directors

The Board of Directors is composed of Elisabeth Bandi-Ott (General Practitioners), Hans Ulrich Bucher (President), Cornelia Gawenda (Finance), Jacques Gubler (KSW-Phonsavan), Marion Mönkhoff (Vice

President; Neonatology), Claudia Reichmuth (Neonatology, Nursing), Martin Sauter (IT) and Pierre Villars (Gynecology and Obstetrics). It met on 2/2/2021 and 5/19/2021 for a video session and on 7/10/2021 for a face-to-face meeting. Numerous videoconferences were held in smaller groups for this purpose.

#### Members

On 31.12.2021 the association had 131 (previous year 134) members, including 3 honorary members (Urs Lauper, Aline Kundig and Peter Neumann) and 12 (14) members in formation.

#### Annual Meeting

The regular annual meeting was held as a hybrid event on 22.6.2021 at the Gemeinschaftszentrum Riesbach (see minutes). Afterwards, a buffet was offered outside. This allowed conversations without wearing masks.

#### 20th Anniversary

On 4.9.2021 the celebration of the 20th anniversary, which had been postponed by one year, took place. More than a hundred people met at the Erlengut in Erlenbach ZH in bright weather. They were delighted with Laotian food, Laotian beer, film screenings and musical performances. Posters were presented showing the development of the project. Competitions and games enjoyed lively participation. There was a cheerful, informal atmosphere, not least because the obligation to wear masks outdoors could be suspended.

## **Communication**

Our most important communication channel is the website [www.swisslaos.ch](http://www.swisslaos.ch). It received a total of 7,770 visits in 2021 (previous year: 6,000), partly thanks to our participation in the Google Ad Grants program. 20 percent of the visits happened on the English website version, which exists since 2020. In addition, we report on current events via Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. We sent out four e-mail newsletters to 375 subscribers (previous year 350) and a printed newsletter to 1,338 addresses in fall 2020, together with the anniversary brochure.

Our traditional photo calendar 2022 was printed in a quantity of 200 copies.

## **Working Groups**

### **Gynecology/Obstetrics**

A total of 7,333 (previous year: 7,073) births were recorded in the Mother Newborn Hospital (MNH), of which 2,313 (2,257) were by cesarean section. 897 (881) newborns were hospitalized in the neonatology department.

The courses on consolidation of perinatal medicine and hygiene standards planned by Dr. U. Kullmer for spring 2021 had to be postponed to 2022.

### **HIV Prevention**

Despite the Corona pandemic, 3,444 HIV tests were performed in the first half of 2021 (full previous year: 9,298). Of these, 15 were positive (full previous year 52). The HIV-positive individuals were referred to an HIV center for free treatment. HIV-positive mothers with infants also received free powdered milk, as they are not allowed to

breastfeed, in order to prevent transmission of HIV to their child.

### **Birth Kits**

A total of 63,000 flacons of Triple Dye for navel disinfection were produced at Pharmacy 3 in Vientiane. We have no information on distribution and use in the periphery.

### **Neonatology**

The neonatal network, which includes hospitals in eight provinces, was maintained through Internet contacts. Medical and organizational problems were discussed. Planned workshops on relevant topics of neonatal care had to be postponed until 2022.

In the program for the follow-up of premature infants established by Regine Wehrle since 2018, 150 children were included until the end of August 2021. These children have their growth and development, nutritional status and vaccination status checked at the age of 2 years.

### **General Practitioners**

Since the planned on-site missions could not be carried out, additional grants were awarded. During video conferences, cases were presented and guidelines were discussed. Among other things, the assessment and treatment of diabetes, hypertension and thalassemia were discussed with experts from Switzerland. This form of professional training met with great interest, but is not a complete substitute for on-site teaching.

### **KSW–Phonsavan**

Kantonsspital Winterthur KSW, the cantonal hospital in Winterthur, maintains an independent partnership with the provincial hospital in Phonsavan since 2010 to exchange knowledge, skills and experience in various hospital activities. For information on activities in 2021, please refer to the website [www.ksw-laos.ch](http://www.ksw-laos.ch).

### **Hospital Management Training**

The courses planned by Dr. Alphons Schnyder in close cooperation with the Lao Ministry of Health had to be cancelled due to the Corona pandemic. However, the hospital autonomy project in three pilot hospitals is to be continued in 2022.

### **Establishment of Psychiatry in Laos**

In collaboration with the Mental Health Department at Mahosot Hospital, a concept for a Mental Health Collaboration Program for the whole of Laos was developed.

## **Construction Projects**

### **Luang Namtha**

The renovation of two operating theaters and ancillary rooms in the provincial hospital came to a standstill. As soon as the immigration regulations allow it, we will clarify the situation on site.

### **Nonghet**

In the new operating room, 71 gynecological procedures and 65 appendectomies were performed during the reporting year.

### **Savannakhet**

The establishment of the departments for gynecology/obstetrics, neonatology and pediatrics in a completely renovated wing, which was planned with the financial help of the Claus Cramer Foundation and another foundation, suffered delays. At least the structural work was completed by the end of the year.

## **Equipment and Materials**

Due to the uncertain situation, the collected material was kept back in Switzerland and only loaded into a container at the end of December. This container is expected to arrive at Mother Newborn Hospital in February 2022. From there, the material will be distributed to various hospitals.

Three sets of surgical instruments were purchased for the new operating room at Nonghet District Hospital.

## **Further and Advanced Training**

### **Scholarships**

In order to at least partially compensate for the lack of courses and on-site visits, more scholarships were awarded for further training. A total of eight doctors, three nurses and one laboratory assistant were supported. In addition, a contract was signed with the Candlelight Language and Vocational Training Center in Vientiane for weekly English courses. However, these had to be suspended due to the Corona pandemic.

### **Exchange Program for Students**

In 2021, no students from Switzerland could do an internship in Vientiane because of the

Corona pandemic. There is a long list of applicants.

## Corona Pandemic Emergency Aid

Laos was hit late by the Corona pandemic. We provided know-how to fight the pandemic and money to purchase protective materials such as protective masks and aprons, but also soap and detergent. In the provincial hospital of Champasak (Pakse), the purchase of a large washing machine and dryer was funded.

## Annual Financial Statement & Audit Report 2021

See separate document.

## Acknowledgements

Despite the Corona pandemic, we were able to achieve a number of things in Laos during the year under review; in some cases, we broke new ground.

We received free advice from many experts in Switzerland as well as financial support from numerous sponsors.

I would like to thank all of them warmly on behalf of the Laotian government and people.

January 20, 2022



Prof. em. Hans Ulrich Bucher, President



**Ihre Spende  
in guten Händen.**