

PROJECT SA'BAI: IN SERVICE

10 YEARS



Legend

1. Couldn't have accomplished a great clinic day without the help of our Cambodian Wing from the University of Puthisastra!
2. Testing out the portable water filters which were given out to a random sample of villagers in Phum Chreh
3. Our alumni doctor and translator working together during one of the consults at Teuk Thla School
4. A focus group discussion with the villagers during one of our Participatory Learning for Action sessions

WHAT WE DO

In 2015, Project Sa'Bai, an Overseas Community Involvement Programme under the National University of Singapore (NUS) Medical Society, celebrated its tenth year of service. Project Sa'Bai has offered free clinics and health screenings for thousands of patients in Cambodia, many of whom consider our clinics to be their only source of healthcare.

Over the course of two weeks in December last year, Project Sa'Bai screened a grand total of 2,238 patients in Cambodian schools and villages, sent out 24 external investigations and referred 121 external care cases to our Cambodian healthcare partners.

In recent years, we have seen an increase in the need for a solution to provide year-round healthcare to help patients manage their chronic conditions more effectively. As such, Project Sa'Bai pioneered the Referral System in 2012, which has grown from working with one-man non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to forming partnerships with the largest Cambodian hospitals in Phnom Penh. Our partners include

the Rose Eye Clinic, which offers free cataract surgery, and the Khmer Soviet Friendship Hospital, one of the largest Cambodian hospitals catering to the healthcare needs of the underprivileged. Our commitment towards developing an extensive referral system has helped reintegrate our patients back into their local healthcare systems.

OUR 2015 FOCUS

Among the aims for each trip was identifying gaps in healthcare knowledge and needs through population studies. During Project Sa'Bai 2015, we forsook the usual surveys in favour of Participatory Learning for Action, an open-ended discussion method introduced to us by Dr Sri Chander, the Asia-Pacific Regional Health Advisor of World Vision from 1987 to 2014. Our conversations with the villagers brought to our attention the prevalence of gastrointestinal illnesses due to poor hygiene habits and water quality. In order to enhance the water quality, our pioneering committee led the change of water filters in Don Bosco School in Phum Chreh and distributed new portable membrane filters to nearby villages.

Our team also focused on **improving the sustainability of our project** by further developing our exit plan. In 2014, we established our Sa'Bai Cambodian Wing, which consists of five medical students from the University of Puthisastra. As Cambodians themselves, they are in a better position to serve their fellow citizens, navigate the healthcare facilities and provide more comprehensive clinics for the underprivileged communities. Last year, the Cambodian Wing worked closely with us in creating educational materials, liaising with Cambodian healthcare organisations and procuring pharmaceuticals and logistics. Over the next few years, we hope to ease them into taking over the existing clinics while the Singaporean Wing moves on to new locations to identify other underprivileged communities in need of our help.

Yet another initiative was the reviewing of the schools' health

education syllabus to keep it relevant. Our health education team has put in great effort to sustain the students' interest over the past year by ensuring that the content is different yet effective in filling the gaps in health knowledge. Other efforts by the team included the use of donated soft toys to teach kindergarten children how to dress their wounds, in a bid to make health education lessons more interactive and interesting for the younger ones.

IN RETROSPECT

Planning this project has given us a more holistic view on healthcare delivery, beyond what we are exposed to as medical students. Through the experience, we realised the meticulous coordination involved between various stakeholders and the immense operational requirements needed to deliver free healthcare to our patients in Cambodia. At the same time, we also saw that there was a need to inspire a change in how the Cambodians take care of their own health through targeted health education efforts in order for us to make a lasting impact on their health.

This trip also taught us the importance of having a well-governed and coordinated healthcare system. We faced many difficulties in referring our patients to their local hospitals, which has imbued in us a deeper appreciation for our own healthcare system considering its efficiency, access to state-of-the-art technology and heart for the people.

Providing referrals for our patients who needed more advanced health services beyond the capabilities of our clinic proved to be a huge challenge. Due to the overwhelming number of patients needing referrals, as well as the limited funds and resources available, we were forced to make the difficult decision on which patients were given priority. As a group of unqualified medical students, we faced situations where the patients' conditions were far too severe for us to do anything substantial to help, and those with less severe yet more treatable conditions had to be "chosen" over those with more painful conditions.

Unfortunately, some patients whom we could treat turned down treatment for reasons that would seem insignificant to us yet crucial to them, such as needing to be home to feed their children, not being able to afford the transport for follow-up, or simply due to fear which stems from the stigma associated with surgery.

Despite all these limitations, we took comfort in knowing that we have at least provided them with support and help while we were there to serve their medical needs. Our shared experiences will serve as the bedrock of encouragement in our lives as future healthcare professionals.

OUR THANKS

To end off, the Project Sa'Bai team would like to thank Drs John and Priscilla Lee for their unwavering support throughout the course of our project term and we are grateful for their kind mentorship. Our project owes its success to the support of our local community and we would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all volunteers and sponsors who made Project Sa'Bai 2015 possible. As we prepare for the next project, we hope to continue receiving support from the local medical community. If you would like to support Project Sa'Bai in any way, or to find out more about our project, please contact us at projectsabai@gmail.com. ♦



PROFILE



TEXT AND PHOTOS BY

TRICIA CHEW LI TING

Tricia Chew is a second year medical student at NUS. She loves meeting new people and getting to know what makes them tick. Often, she relaxes by reading, exercising, drawing and playing the piano.



TEXT AND PHOTOS BY

CASSANDRA ANG YANG XUAN

Cassandra Ang is a second year medical student at NUS. She enjoys a variety of hobbies such as cooking, singing and exercising. She likes to lead an active lifestyle by dancing and going on hikes.