

Cambodian dental nurses receive Dentaid portable chairs and kits at their graduation ceremony.



There are only around 450 dentists and 330 dental nurses for a population of 15 million in Cambodia. Large numbers of trained and skilled people were killed under the ravages of the Khmer Rouge in the 1970's but the country is gradually rebuilding.

Dentaid and Dr Neil Sikka of Barbican Dental Care in London are delighted to have been able to play a part in increasing the provision of oral health care to the rural population of Cambodia by supporting the training and equipping of Cambodian dental nurses.

Dentaid was originally approached by the Cambodian Ministry of Health, Dental Nurses' Training School requesting the provision of 24 basic sets of dental equipment, instruments and portable chairs for graduating nurses from the regional training centre in Kampong Cham, with the aim of helping them set up mobile dental health clinics within regional health centres. Andy Jong, Dentaid's CEO, comments, "This was a large request but one tailor-made for the portable chair Dentaid had recently developed. We were delighted when Dr Neil Sikka expressed an interest in the chair and in this excellent project and generously provided the full funding needed for it to proceed".

Thanks to this partnership, in February 2010, ten graduate dental nurses were presented with their instrument kits and portable chairs at a special ceremony at the Regional Training Centre, Kampong Cham. We have followed-up of several of them since then and they are now providing these much needed services in their own rural areas, and giving oral health education in primary schools and local communities. The other fourteen sets of equipment are being kept for new students graduating later this year.

The dental nurses' training school was established in 1992 and the position of "dental nurse" was introduced to meet the needs of the rural population who have little access to medical or dental services. They provide basic medical and dental care and are trained to identify conditions such as oral cancer (referring the patient for treatment), and to provide extractions, scaling, anaesthetic and simple ART (Atraumatic Restorative

Treatment) – basic care which can be given, without highly technical equipment, in rural health centres which may not have electricity or running water.

In the past their basic equipment was provided at graduation. However, budgetary restrictions recently have meant that the graduates were not receiving the instruments to carry on this vital work. Neil Sikka, of Barbican Dental Care, comments, “I was motivated to help because without support to purchase these kits and chairs, the dental programme was in danger of collapsing. Nurses were reluctant to begin the course if they had no guarantee of being able to carry out the work”.

Andy and Neil met recently to review the project. Neil summarised his feelings about being involved saying, “Empowering the local community is vital to the sustainability of any project. This innovative approach will give many people in rural communities access to dental care”. Andy’s hope is that others will follow his lead and help fund the next batch of chairs and equipment for the 2011 graduates.



The Dentaid chairs awaiting shipping to Cambodia.