

Improving Rural Health Initiative

A Lao PDR & University of Calgary Collaboration

Spring 2015
Issue 1



Medical Training for Improved Health Care Delivery in Laos

Strengthen the Lao University of Health Sciences capacity to improve the economic and health status of Laos through reform of **health human resources training**

HOW WE STARTED

The government of the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) recognized the need to improve health care delivery such that it would meet the needs of the people of Laos. The government continues to work toward poverty alleviation and improved health in the inaccessible communities.

Fifteen years ago the **Lao PDR Ministry of Health approached the University of Calgary Faculty of Medicine** for assistance. The University of Calgary Faculty of Medicine was known to the Lao government because of the similar work the university had done in the Philippines.

Since 2002 the University of Calgary Faculty of Medicine and the Lao University of Health Sciences have collaborated to achieve the following:

- 1) Redesign the Lao Undergraduate Medical Education Curriculum
- 2) Update the training of Lao Medical Educators and Medical Students
- 3) Establish a Family Medicine Specialist Training Program
- 4) Establish Medical Training Facilities in key locations throughout Laos, to enhance effectiveness in the heavily populated rural areas.

The intended result would be highly qualified graduating physicians who could understand, and address needs of the Lao people. Further more, these graduates would be expected to aspire to become leaders within their fields and communities. (i.e. 5 Star doctors - Medical Expert/Clinician, Community Leader/Organizer, Educator, Researcher, Manager).

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ACHIEVING THE GOALS

GOAL 1: REDESIGN THE LAO UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The University of Calgary Faculty of Medicine and the Lao University of Health Sciences partnered to **re-build their undergraduate medical education curriculum**.

A brief overview of the process is:

- A needs assessment was performed to understand what topics should be taught that would be relevant to future practice needs
- The faculty members adopted updated teaching methods including problem-based learning and student-centered learning techniques
- An updated evaluation of the new curriculum was introduced

GOAL 2: UPDATE THE TRAINING OF LAO MEDICAL EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

The University of Calgary Faculty of Medicine Educators have been mentoring their Lao colleagues since 2002. Initially, key Lao Medical Educators and Health Care Officials were brought to Calgary to be exposed to the Canadian medical education training system. Existing Lao faculty members were introduced to different teaching tools, including role modeling, hands-on bedside learning and “one-minute lectures”. These **teaching techniques were implemented in Laos to promote problem based,**

practical, hands-on learning. Calgary and Lao Medical Educators have been promoting and facilitating these techniques in Laos ever since.

GOAL 3: ESTABLISH A FAMILY MEDICINE SPECIALTY TRAINING PROGRAM

The University of Calgary’s Faculty of Medicine and the Lao University of Health Services partnered to develop a two-year post-graduate **Family Medicine Specialty Training Program** to better service the needs of their people (primarily rural).

A brief overview of the curriculum is:

- **Year1:** Hands-on, bedside training including rotations with specialists at Provincial hospitals
- **Year 2:** Six-month practicum in a rural village where the student undertakes a medical topic of interest in that community and develops practical solutions. Subsequently, students are placed in a district hospital for further training.

Over the last ten years more than **150 physicians** (approximately 50% male and 50% female) have graduated from the **Family Medicine Specialty Training Program**. These graduates now practice medicine throughout Laos, many in smaller community medical facilities.

GOAL 4: ESTABLISH AND SUSTAIN MEDICAL TRAINING FACILITIES IN KEY LOCATIONS THROUGHOUT LAOS

Three Provincial Hospitals have been developed into teaching centers and are now training facilities for medical students and for the **Family Medicine Specialty Training Program**. These are located in:

- Savannakhet (Savannakhet Province)
- Maria Theresa hospital (Vientiane Province)
- Pakse (Champasak Province)

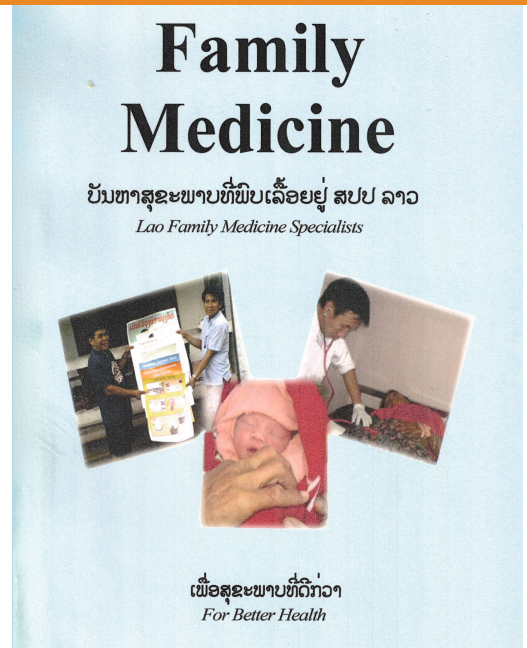
These facilities provide high standards of educational training by Lao Medical Educators to Lao Medical Students and Family Medicine Specialty Training Program Residents.

Scholarships are provided to approximately six students from rural areas each year so that they may attend medical school with the view to eventually return to practice in the rural areas.

KEEPING PACE WITH THE EVOLVING NEEDS

With new Family Medicine Specialist physician graduates entering the Lao health care system, the need for *continuing support for the graduates* became apparent. An annual *Continuing Medical Education Conference (CME)* brings graduates together for workshops, to facilitate knowledge dissemination. The graduates are currently in process of forming their own Family Medicine Alumni Association to further strengthen their ability to network and share knowledge and experiences. Under the *Adopt-a-Region* program, Faculty of Medicine Educators from the University of Calgary continue to travel to the various regions of Laos to provide specialty training to the Family Medicine Specialty graduates in the locations they work.

This *Improving Rural Health Initiative* facilitated the Family Medicine Specialist graduates in their writing of the first *Lao Family Medicine Specialists textbook* written in Lao language. The textbook represents the knowledge, skills, attitudes and scope of work of Lao Family Medicine Specialists.

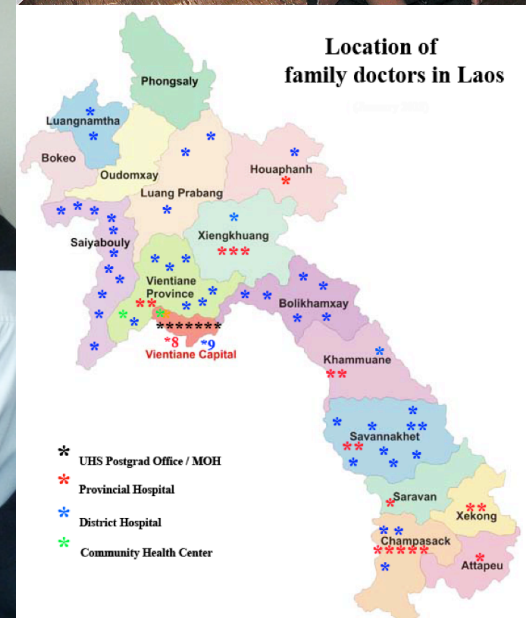


Feedback from the graduates of the *Family Medicine Specialty Training Program*:

Provides a broad foundation of general clinical skills and a variety of skills that are relevant to the needs of their communities and improve quality of patient care and service

Provides a bridge for trainees to connect with the community and build trust

Embraces the government target of District Hospitals as centers of excellence and Provincial Hospitals as teaching centers





MOVING FORWARD

In Fall 2014, graduates of the **Family Medicine Specialty Training Program** provided feedback on the collaborative work done to date by the University of Calgary and the Lao University Health Sciences. The graduates also provided their needs moving forward so that all efforts will continue to promote **“made in Laos”** solutions.



University of Calgary Medical Educators of the **Improving Rural Health Initiative** are responding to the needs of the Laos doctors by:

1. Providing ongoing training and support for the **Family Medicine Specialist physician graduates in their roles as medical educators for new graduate doctors and other health care workers in the more rural areas where they are now working** within Laos. Calgary doctors of various specialties continue to travel to rural Laos to provide continuing medical education (**Adopt-a-Region**).
2. Continuing to participate and fund the annual **Continuing Medical Education Conference**.
3. Funding of **Scholarships for medical student applicants from underserved areas**
4. Implementing the needs identified in the recently conducted **needs assessment** including **Quality Improvement** procedures and protocols.
5. Providing ongoing **training to Lao Faculty of Medicine Educators**
6. Publishing and distributing the **Lao Family Medicine Specialists textbook** and providing other teaching aids

*Go to the People, live with them, learn from them, love them.
Start with what they know, build with what they have.
But with the best leaders, when the work is done, the task accomplished,
the people will say, “We have done this Ourselves”*

Donations to **“Improving Rural Health Initiative: A Lao PDR & University of Calgary Collaboration”** can be made as follows:

By Mail: Wilma Dodge, Director UME
Cumming School of Medicine,
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P: 403.220.3945
E: wdodge@ucalgary.ca

Please make cheque payable to:
University of Calgary
Reference: Faculty of Medicine Lao Project

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Some of the 150 graduates of the Family Medicine Specialty Training Program

