

On September 22, 2015 it will be 23 years since Kantha Bopha I children's hospital of Phnom Penh was opened after reconstruction.

The request was made to me by the late King Norodom Sihanouk in September 1991 during the preparation period of the Paris Peace Agreements. The children's hospital Kantha Bopha destroyed by war was to undergo reconstruction. In 1974/75 I had worked at Kantha Bopha as a pediatrician of a Red Cross delegation until the Khmer Rouge invaded Phnom Penh.

The Khmer Rouge established a horrendous reign of terror. The number of prisons, labor camps and concentrations camps was 300 country-wide. These locations became the breeding places of tuberculosis. Tuberculosis exploded throughout the country. In some children we had diagnosed the disease already in 1974/75.

According to our estimation, 65% of the Cambodian population are infected by tuberculosis and are carriers of the "dormant tuberculosis". This primary infection can be diagnosed by computer tomography (CT).

Even in an otherwise healthy child who is carrier of tuberculosis by infection (dormant tuberculosis) the defense mechanism against infectious activation and spread is reduced due to the consumed (wasted) immuno-potential. Therefore, the child's immune system may not be able to keep the primary (dormant) tuberculosis under control and to prevent spread of tuberculous bacilli within the blood stream causing severe tuberculous disease, such as meningitis, skeletal infection, abscesses in the liver, lungs and brain and severe pneumonia.

In 2014 we had 22 000 children hospitalized who suffered from severe active tuberculosis. After correct treatment they are medically cured, and many may be cured surgically as well. **Over the 23 years we never came across any reinfection among these children.**

In addition, the infected and apparently healthy child with a reduced potential of the immune system is much more prone to contract other diseases than children of the neighboring countries Thailand, Vietnam and Laos. Therefore, Dengue fever, brain stem inflammation/infection, and viral bronchitis, among others, exhibit a very severe course. **This also necessitates daily surgery for multiple cases of perforated appendix.**

Thanks to our maternity clinic equipped with modern diagnostic tools we are aware of the fact that an apparently healthy young mother may be infected with tuberculosis (dormant tuberculosis) and may transmit the tuberculous agent to

her new born child. - **Thus tuberculosis seems to be a living heritage of health destruction from the reign of terror by the Khmer Rouge. Transmission from mother to child, and again from mother to child. The reign of terror by the Khmer Rouge was a consequence of politics by the major powers and of the neglect by the International Community.**

Again and again the question comes up: why is there no contribution to Kantha Bopha made by the major powers and the International Community? Is there a geopolitical type of interest in a high mortality rate of Cambodian children? **Kantha Bopha children's hospitals admit 85% of all severely diseased Cambodian children. The mortality rate reached the low level of only 0.3%.**

Over the past 23 years (1992-2015) we treated 15 million sick children and admitted 1.6 million severely diseased children to the Kantha Bopha hospitals. Around 80% of hospitalized children would either not have survived or might have overcome their disease with some invalidity for life. **This perspective has not changed. In July 2015, a new epidemic of Dengue fever was flaring-up and remains active. Children turn up in shock, day and night, often hourly.**

The Cambodian government has now doubled their contribution of formerly three million dollars. A sign of encouragement, especially regarding the future. In addition, the government declared to guarantee preservation of the Kantha Bopha system permanently: Treatment at Kantha Bopha hospitals is free of charge for all. The 2500 Cambodian employees receive correct salaries. Nobody is working outside the hospitals. Nobody may accept money from families who are mostly poor.

The budget of running costs for 2015 is expected to be 43.5 million dollars. The Kantha Bopha hospitals still perform at the highest cost/healing rate. **Only thanks to the consistent sponsoring, mostly from Switzerland, is Kantha Bopha still in the position to accomplish all aspects of the complex health care.**

Each CHF, EURO and US-Dollar is a help in the effort to heal, rescue and prevent. We thank you from our heart.

Dr. Beat Richner, founder and head of Kantha Bopha since 1992
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