

# Awareness Cambodia

Working in South-East Asia has given Emergency Physician Dr Kerry Hoggett a very different perspective on the problems of our First World health system.

Dr Kerry Hoggett is an Emergency Medicine physician at RPH with a sub-specialty in Clinical Toxicology. She travels to remote areas in both Cambodia and Myanmar conducting training programs and health clinics with a strong focus on fostering local expertise.

“I’ve been to Myanmar four times in the past 18 months under a joint arrangement with the Royal Australian College of Surgeons, the Australasian College of Emergency Medicine and the Hong Kong College of Emergency Medicine.”

“For Myanmar in particular, we’re keen to introduce the specialty of Emergency Medicine. And we do toxicology teaching as well.”

Kerry expands on the strong sociocultural differences between countries such as Australia and the developing world.

“I’m always shocked when I arrive back in Perth! In fact, I find it more of a problem coming home than anything I experience over there. The people in rural Cambodia



■ Dr Kerry Hoggett with a patient at the Operation Nightingale clinic.

have next to nothing and they’re grateful for any help whatsoever. Conversely, you come back to Australia and see people with so many opportunities making poor health decisions.”

“Some of the things they complain about are absolutely insignificant compared with the Cambodians.”

Despite the severity of the problems associated with poverty and a paucity

of medical resources, the Awareness Cambodia program is making an impact.

“I’ve seen the local doctors develop their skills to a marked degree, even since June last year. They had no real concept of emergency medicine but, with our current training programs, the local doctors are becoming highly effective teams.”

“We’ve worked with the same group of doctors and medical students for the



■ Australian medical team: Top row L-R: Dr Kerry Hoggett (Emergency Physician and Clinical Toxicologist), Emma Larter (RN), Nancy Kennedy (RN) and Dr Mark Flynn (GP). Bottom row L-R: Erin Clapham (RN), Dr Lester Mascarenhas (GP) and Dr Gary Hewett (dentist and CEO of Awareness Cambodia).

last couple of years and we can see real progression in that group, too.”

Awareness Cambodia began in 1996 and the current CEO and founder is Dr Gary Hewett, a Perth dentist.

“Gary went there, saw the poverty and started an orphanage for children of HIV parents. He broadened that out into education and health with local doctors providing free medical clinics in the provinces.”

There are a number of different programs operating health clinics in the Kompong Speu region using Cambodian doctors and nursing staff. The local people struggle with illiteracy, poor nutrition and inherited debt that translates into substance and domestic abuse coupled with serious health issues.

“We go out with local medical staff under the supervision of the health department to do vaccinations and health checks. It’s all part of Operation Nightingale and a lot of it is in quite remote provinces. Nonetheless, it’s safe and I’ve never felt in any danger.”

Kerry came to Perth from Queensland as a teenager, completed her secondary

education and seized a career option denied to older members of her family. She studied medicine at UWA and post-graduate training here and in New Zealand.

“I’ve always wanted to do medicine and have never wanted to be anything else. Both my mother and grandfather would’ve loved to have been doctors but they never had the opportunity.”

Kerry has a strong commitment to provide a platform for local people, in both Cambodia and Myanmar, to develop their own health resources. It’s far more than going into a developing country, ‘practising’ procedures and flying home again.

“It’s far better to leave a legacy, from a medical perspective, that’s sustainable rather than taking sophisticated equipment into these places and then taking it all home with you. For me, it’s important to be involved with projects that develop local services enabling local people to take over when we leave.”

“Long-term projects are much more rewarding. We have a scholarship program at the moment where we hope to put young people living in provincial areas through medical school. That will flow back into improved health outcomes in remote and rural areas.”



### ■ Complications

This patient did not have any paperwork and lived in a remote village. He had travelled to Phnom Penh and paid for the initial operation.

It appears that he had not received any post-op care after the posts were inserted into his leg, which were to be removed in another five months.

The patient complained of not having any money to make the journey to Phnom Penh for surgery to remove the posts. The Dr Hoggett and the ACI team cleaned his wounds and gave him antibiotics.

Kerry expects to be travelling to Cambodia and Myanmar for the next decade and has some career advice for young medical students.

“Enjoy your career, it’s flexible and you can turn it into anything you want. Take every opportunity that’s offered and grab it with both hands. It’s such an amazing experience to do things outside your day-to-day activities.”

[www.awarecam.org.au](http://www.awarecam.org.au) ●

**By Mr Peter McClelland**