

SIGN

FRACTURE CARE INTERNATIONAL



SIGN Surgeon Duong Bunn (right) makes rounds at Preah Kossamak Hospital in Cambodia.

Healing Cambodia's Past & Future

By Chuck Bigger, Photojournalist

At Cambodia's first and oldest operating hospital Dr. Duong Bunn and his orthopaedic team are busily making their morning rounds — no small task with 140 full beds in the wards. The volume alone means the time spent with each patient must be brief, but Dr. Bunn finds the time each day. He uses the opportunity to dispense compassion to the patients and seize teaching moments to share his expertise with his staff. As the main referral hospital in the country, Phnom Penh's aging Preah Kossamak Hospital sees more cases of orthopaedic trauma than any other hospital in Cambodia.

As the longtime head of orthopaedics, Dr. Bunn's compassion and desire to help others was borne out of witnessing

and living through Cambodia's darkest years. Few in the West can think of Cambodia without thinking of the "killing fields", established under the regime of the Khmer Rouge who came to power in the mid 1970s on the heels of the Vietnam War. It was those years that set Dr. Bunn upon his path to become the compassionate medical doctor he is today.

The Khmer Rouge regime set a new standard for brutality in the world. An estimated 2-3 million people — 25 percent of Cambodia's population — was either executed or starved to death under their four-year rule. Among the first on the list singled out for extermination were doctors, along with teachers, journalists, or anyone with an education.

The regime broke families apart and sent them to different labor camps. Separated from his parents, his three brothers, and a sister, Dr. Bunn worked as a laborer in the rice fields and built mud dams by hand. He lived at the work sites in open thatched huts, and work began promptly at 6am each day and went until 8pm. The daily food ration was about three ounces of rice, not enough to sustain a child, let alone an adult.

Dr. Bunn weeps quietly as he recalls being perpetually hungry and exhausted. To supplement the meager rations he and his co-workers turned to eating leaves from the trees. "We did everything just to live," he recalls. The brutal regime was so (*continued on page 2*)

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(continued from page 1) concerned with controlling all food sources that they cut down all fruit bearing trees and made fishing in Cambodia's plentiful waters punishable by death.

Dr. Bunn persevered through the years of hardship by clinging to the hope that if he could only survive the ordeal he would one day be reunited with his family. With the ouster of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, Dr. Bunn was reunited with his parents and his sister. Sadly he never saw his three brothers again. "By the time it was over, every Cambodian had seen death," he says.

Cambodia, to this day, is still in a state of recovery from the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge. The level of destruction inflicted upon the country in those years still contributes to the level of poverty that many Cambodians face today, which is more extreme than many of its Southeast Asia neighbors. "After those years we had nothing," says Dr. Bunn.

Left with the desire to alleviate the suffering of his people Dr. Bunn took advantage of the new government's attempts to restore the professional class by offering free education. Upon completing his studies in Cambodia, he studied orthopaedics in France for two years before returning to Phnom Penh and taking over as the head of the

orthopaedic department at the government-run hospital where he has worked now for 15 years.

Dr. Bunn was first introduced to the SIGN System by a colleague in Vietnam in 2003 and immediately recognized the potential help it could bring to Cambodia. A subsequent 2004 visit from Dr. Zirkle established the SIGN Program there. Since that time more than 14,000 Cambodian patients have had their lives restored through SIGN Surgery. Dr. Bunn's hospital has been responsible for expanding SIGN Programs to 15 other hospitals in eight provinces across Cambodia.

"SIGN is helping to lower the rate of poverty in Cambodia by preventing lifelong disability and allowing injured people to be restored to earn money to support their families."
— Dr. Bunn

"Because of SIGN the younger generation of surgeons can deliver care equal to that of other developed countries," Dr. Bunn says. "Without the treatment option from SIGN, many patients would be disabled for life."



Dr. Bunn reviewing X-rays.

The need for more implants in Cambodia grows daily. Currently Preah Kossamak Hospital is operating at full capacity on its orthopaedic wards and four operating rooms where surgeons perform 1 to 3 SIGN Surgeries each day. In the month of February alone 87 SIGN Surgeries were performed.

Six additional operating rooms are under construction, with completion scheduled in the next two months. This will more than double the current capacity for SIGN Surgeries, and there is no shortage of patients in need of recovery from long bone fractures.

"I want to thank SIGN, Dr. Zirkle, CEO Jeanne Dillner, and all SIGN Staff for always supporting me and the Cambodian people," says Dr. Bunn. "SIGN is helping to lower the rate of poverty in Cambodia by preventing lifelong disability and allowing injured people to be restored to earn money to support their families. It is also changing the mindset of the Cambodian people to believe in the orthopaedic field."

Just outside of Phnom Penh in the "killing fields" stands a somber monument where more than 8,000 skulls exhumed from the surrounding mass graves reflect on the worst side of humanity. Dr. Bunn's life will forever be shadowed by the whispers of memories from those years, but those events shaped him into the man he is today, representing the best of humanity through his compassionate heart and healing hands for the poor.



Preah Kossamak Hospital has performed 3,984 SIGN Surgeries.

Motorbikes: A Dangerous Opportunity

By Chuck Bigger, Photojournalist

Motorbikes are a great boon to families with limited incomes. They are inexpensive to purchase and enable transportation for work, school, shopping, and many other activities. However, traffic accidents with motorbikes often cause serious injuries and broken bones. Each of these patients at Preah Kossamak Hospital in Phnom Penh was injured in a motorbike crash.

Kouy Kim Hel

Kouy is a school-teacher. He was injured one month ago in a motorcycle traffic accident with a vehicle. During his follow-up he was happy to show his capacity for walking unassisted and is looking forward to returning to his classroom duties within the next month.



Sao Thy



The first thing the father of four thought about as he lay in the road following his accident is how would he be able to keep his children in school if he could not walk. Public schools require tuition in Cambodia and unpaid students are quickly dispatched from the rolls. “Education is the way to a better life for my children,” says Sao, 39. Four months after his SIGN Surgery, Sao was back at work and his children are still in school.

Sor Sre Nichuf



Sor, 20, lives with her parents in a rural province of Cambodia where they are subsistence farmers growing rice and some vegetables. Sor has finished her primary education and helps her parents work their small plot of land. She received one of the 87 SIGN surgeries performed in February at Preah Kossamak Hospital.

Choeun Pheakday



Choeun needed two SIGN Nails, the femur and tibia of the same leg. She had to undergo two separate procedures because her system was not strong enough to handle both at the same time. She was expected to be discharged in about 10 days.

Save the Dates

WINE & DINE for SIGN

September 30
Portland Benefit

Portland Art Museum
Portland, OR

October 21
Tri-Cities Benefit

Three Rivers Convention
Center, Kennewick, WA

August 24
Open House

11:00 am. - 2:00 p.m., at SIGN

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