

Mid-year report-Oncology

Prepared for Help United Children Foundation

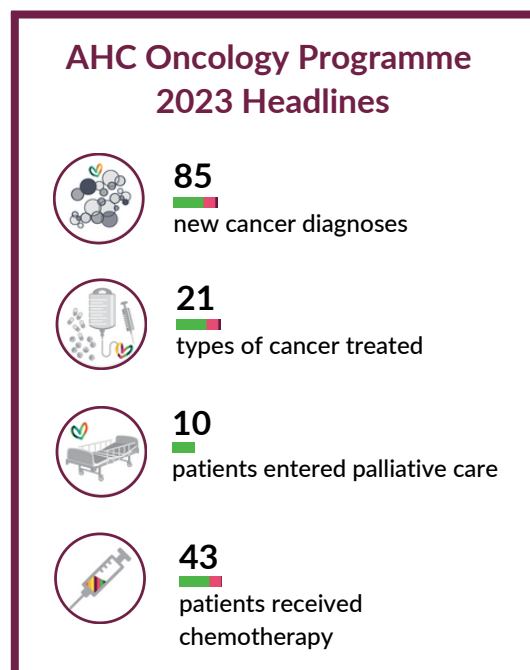
Project update: July - December 2023

As the year ended, we reflected on a busy and productive year at Angkor Hospital for Children (AHC). The number of children receiving treatment at the hospital remained steady at around 80,000, with 45% of children visiting for the first time, showing the high demand for specialty treatment.

With the support of the Help United Children Foundation, over the past year AHC's Oncology Team worked tirelessly to diagnose and treat 85 patients. The most frequent types of cancer diagnosed in children at AHC are retinoblastoma (RB), acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL), and acute myeloid leukaemia (AML), accounting for more than 57% of cancer diagnoses.

As part of AHC's first strategic goal to expand specialty services to meet gaps in the Cambodian health system, the Education Department recruited two new oncologist trainees in December 2023. The new recruits will officially join the Oncology Unit in February 2024 after finishing their one-year paediatric fellowship programme at AHC.

During the reporting period, the AHC Oncology Team continued to conduct microteaching sessions regularly related to paediatric oncology and haematology protocols on average 4-5 times per month for medical interns from different universities in Cambodia.



Dr Sam Lyvannak, AHC's senior oncologist, officially completed his specialty training programme and will receive recognition from Hospital Director, Dr Ngoun Chanpheaktra, along with five other specialty trainees graduating from the AHC's Paediatric Health Training Academy at AHC's 25th anniversary on 24 February 2024.

This second half of 2023 report highlights the accomplishments, challenges, and exciting future plans in expanding paediatric oncology treatment at Angkor Hospital for Children.

Infection Prevention Control (IPC)



In July 2023, AHC's IPC Unit bought new sharps disposal containers with a capacity of 1kg for oncology needles, presenting a safe and reliable solution for treatment waste. The previous containers had a capacity of 5kg, taking almost a week to be filled. Using specific sharps disposal containers with smaller capacity helps quickly and safely dispose of traces of toxic chemotherapy waste and prevent risks.

This year, the Oncology Ward maintained strong compliance to hand hygiene practice with a compliance rate of 96%, and was also recognised as the September Monthly Clinical IPC Champion.

AHC Oncology Team and Capacity Development

In the second half of 2023, AHC's Oncology Team continued their collaboration with other Cambodian oncologists from Japan Heart Hospital, National Paediatric Hospital, and Calmette Hospital to continue work on developing a Cambodian paediatric cancer network. Weekly case discussions, which are also joined by AHC's overseas mentors, serve as a forum to discuss the challenges of providing paediatric oncology care in resource-limited settings like Cambodia. AHC's overseas mentors offer free diagnostic support for AHC as well as other local paediatric oncology providers, as advanced diagnostics are not yet available in-country.

Besides, enhancing oncology knowledge and capacity among oncologists, AHC's specialized oncology nurses also joined annual refresher courses such as Nursing Process and Basic Life Support, which were hosted by AHC improve care and treatment of children with cancer.

After seven years of developing AHC's Oncology Unit, our Senior Oncologist, Dr Sam Lyvannak plans to resign in May 2024 to pursue his masters degree in public health potentially in Australia, USA or UK. Since April 2016, Dr. Vannak has dedicated and contributed so much to our oncology programme to provide treatment to more than 500 children with cancer. AHC wishes Dr Vannak the best for his future education plans and career.

Challenges

For most of 2023, AHC's Oncology Team did not have a dedicated data clerk, which created workload issues for staff to treat patients and accurately record oncology data. AHC plans to hire a new data clerk in 2024.

AHC is working to develop curricula to train nurses for different specialty practices to improve standards of care. There is currently no formal oncology nurse curriculum to train new nurses to provide chemotherapy administration and other tasks to support oncologists. AHC is currently seeking overseas partners to help create new specialized guidelines in 2024.

Many AHC oncology patients are required to stay for weeks or months to finish their chemotherapy treatment which can lead to emotional distress. AHC's Oncology Team and the Social Work Team have worked closely together to provide workshops, group counselling, one-on-one counselling and emotional support for both patients and caregivers. To address this issue, both teams are working to find donations of toys and coloring books for the children to play and have fun while undergoing treatment.

Looking ahead

Junior Oncologist, Dr. Bun Sereyleak, plans to join a one-month hematology observation program in the United States. AHC also plans to recruit two more oncologist trainees. Dr. Thy Bunpao and Dr. Has Sothearak, who have both recently finished a one-year pediatrics fellowship at AHC, will start a four-year oncology specialty training curriculum in February 2024.

The Oncology Team's international mentors, Dr. Bruce Camitta and Dr. Frank Keller, of Emory University, plan to visit AHC in February 2024. During their time in Cambodia, the AHC Oncology Team have organized a site visit to Japan Heart Hospital to further develop the working relationship with the nascent Cambodian pediatric cancer network. Moreover, they also plan to update treatment protocols using data collected treating patients over the past ten years.

From 2024, AHC's Oncology Team and Nutrition Team will try a special formula recommended by a nutrition expert from the USA for cancer patients that cannot take normal diet to help them recover faster.

In April 28-30 2024, Mrs. Phanern Heng our Oncology Nurse plans to attend the BSH Annual Scientific Meeting in Liverpool, United Kingdom.

In late 2024, AHC is excited to cooperate with the University of Seattle to public the most important research of leukemia and retinoblastoma from AHC describing cancer patient diagnosis, treatment protocol, statistic, geography, age range of patient with both types of cancer.

Thank you for your support!



“My hope for Vortey to be completely healthy is now a reality”

In mid-2023, 18-month-old Vortey fell very ill. She developed a high fever and lumps all over her body. Her skin was pale and bruised. Terrified, young parents Kesor and Hok rushed her to the nearest health

One month later, Hok left his job on a potato farm and borrowed money from their neighbors to make the 200km trip to AHC. By then, Vortey’s condition had become critical. Her eyes were swollen and bleeding.



Vortey before treatment

At AHC, oncologist Dr Sam Lyvannak examined Vortey and performed a bone marrow aspiration to confirm the diagnosis. Hok and Kesor heard the words no parent wants to hear: their daughter had a blood cancer called acute myeloid leukemia (AML).

Heartbroken but determined, Hok and Kesor never left Vortey’s side as she began chemotherapy. Along with the expertise and care from AHC’s oncology team, the social work team provided emotional counseling and funds to travel between AHC and their home for treatment.

“We would never be able to afford this complicated treatment, and with such kind doctors and nurses, I am so grateful. My daughter has become much better already, playing and eating more. AHC is my place of comfort and hope,” shared Kesor.

Vortey has completed four courses of chemotherapy, and her bone marrow is now clear of cancer. Her lumps are gone, and she is no longer swollen. After their eleventh visit, the family returned home with smiles and hopes. Over the next five years, Vortey will return to AHC for follow-up and monitoring.

“Day and night, AHC’s doctors and nurses are there for my child,” shared Kesor. “Thanks to them, my hope for Vortey to be completely healthy is now a reality.”



Vortey and her parents after treatment