

THE CAMBODIA DAILY MOSQUITO NET CAMPAIGN

# Challenges in Fight Against Malaria Discussed at Conference

By MICHELLE VACHON  
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

How to reach people with little or no access to medical care was the first topic on the agenda for provincial health officers at a malaria workshop this week in Phnom Penh.

They gathered for the sixth quarterly meeting of the Malaria Control Project, funded by the European Union, to discuss the situation in Cambodia and next year's plan to fight the disease.

Although indications are that the combined efforts of international organizations, NGOs, the National Malaria Center and the Ministry of Health have reduced the number of cases this year, participants at the three-day meeting spent no time congratulating each other. They instead

discussed upcoming challenges.

The first working session concerned three projects to give people in remote areas information on how to combat the disease.

One project involves 38 villages in Ratanakkiri province. A study started in April showed that malaria remains rampant and children younger than 5 often die of the disease, said Sean Hewitt, malaria control specialist for the EU project. Researchers found that in some tribes, "people don't seek health care—they accept that children die," he said.

Researchers used villagers as malaria workers. The villagers were trained to detect symptoms, use a simple test to check for the disease, distribute emergency medicine and know when to refer a patient to the nearest medical

facility, Hewitt said.

Village workers do not handle medicine usually administered by health professionals. They will use a simplified treatment with artesunate suppositories and mefloquine tablets.

This approach is meant to complement medical services, not replace them, Hewitt said. "It's just for hot spots" such as remote border areas with little or no access to health care, Hewitt said.

The second project focuses on the ethnic Phnong population of Mondolkiri province, with whom the French NGO Nomad is conducting health education and malaria control programs.

Nomad also is recruiting villagers as malaria workers, said Kate Hencher, health education supervisor. In addition, the NGO plans to have local performers stage short skits on malaria and other health issues. The skits will be turned into videos to be shown

in Phnong villages, Hencher said.

The project began about a year ago with Sylvain Vogel and Jean-Michel Filippi, respectively professors of linguistics and of phonetics at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, devising a method for health workers to learn Phnong, a language that has no written form. The kit includes cassettes and a section on Phnong culture, values and beliefs.

Oum Chenda, undersecretary of state for the Ministry of Women's and Veterans' Affairs, talked about a project launched last month in the Oral and Phnom Sruoch districts of Kompong Speu province. Female volunteers are being enrolled to help reduce malaria in their communities.

"Culturally, women take care of the household and of family members' health," Oum Chenda said. "Their opinion is respected in health matters."

The conference ends today.

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