

## Background

Battambang Eye Unit (“BEU”) is a department of Battambang Referral Hospital, a regional hospital that is part of Cambodia’s state funded health care program. For five years starting in 2007, SEVA also supported the Battambang Ophthalmic Care Center (“BOCC”) located just a few blocks from BEU. SEVA concluded their support for BOCC when that program became fully self sustaining and has since been working with BEU to bring free and improved services to the public hospital. Currently there are around 3,000 eye surgeries performed per year at BEU and another 5,000 at BOCC, meaning SEVA supported programs now perform 8,000 surgeries. Focusing Philanthropy visited the BEU as surgeries were being performed for the World Sight Day program and observed a number of cataract surgeries being performed. 400 World Sight Day surgeries will be performed over several months at BEU.



## The Problem

Cambodia today still suffers from the devastating after effects of the Pol Pot regime of the late 1970’s. Pol Pot came to power in 1976 after successfully leading a communist revolution in Cambodia. He imposed a radical form of agrarian socialism on the country, and systematically killed anybody belonging to opposing political parties, intellectuals, and anybody else perceived as a threat to his regime. Included in those killed were academics, doctors, and religious leaders, and “anybody with glasses.” The entire public health system collapsed during his reign as 25% of the population was murdered. Cambodia has thus required significant help in recent decades to rebuild a health system, but still it suffers the effects of those years. Without the help of NGOs like SEVA, the people of Cambodia would have no resources available to fix cases of blindness that are easily preventable using modern but inexpensive medical practices.

## Program Details

The SEVA programs at BOC and BEU have both followed the standard SEVA operational model, involving community outreach to identify patients, transport of blind patients to a surgery center at the nearest capable hospital, and the provision of eye surgery and follow-up care, all at no cost to the patient. SEVA will perform 2,700 surgeries at BEU by the end of 2014. The breakdown by type is as follows:

- Cataract (a clouding of the lens): 65%
- Pterygium (the growth of flesh onto the eyeball): 20%
- Glaucoma (optic nerve damage caused by excess eye pressure): 5%
- Tricasis (abnormal growth of the eyelid): 5%

SEVA provides 99% of medical supplies and intraocular lenses required for all the surgeries performed for patients recruited by SEVA, and for any BEU walk-in patients who cannot afford the cost of the surgery (\$100 for cataracts, \$15 for Pterygium, \$75 for Glaucoma, and \$30 for Tricasis). All materials are sourced from Aravind / Aurolab, an NGO FP visited in 2013 in Madurai, India.

There are 7 SEVA supported field workers based in Battambang who canvass various parts of northern Cambodia up to 180 km from the office. The catchment area covers around 3.6 million people, or about 24% of Cambodia's population. Of the patients recruited by SEVA in the field, 55% show up on the day of surgery. It is unclear why the others do not. The ones who do not show up are generally the less severe cases, and it's assumed they are working or caring for children, and unable or unwilling to take several days for the surgery. Eye surgeries performed at BEU have increased by a factor of six since SEVA initiated its program here.

Three members of the Focusing Philanthropy team visited the BEU on two consecutive days while surgeries were being performed for the World Sight Day fundraising campaign operated jointly by SEVA and Focusing Philanthropy. Of the 6600 surgeries funded under that campaign, 400 will be performed here by the end of 2014. Following are some photos and comments from our two day visit. Although surgeries are performed five days a week, we observed surgeries on day 1 of our visit, and then returned the following morning to observe the bandage removal of those same patients, and their visual exams.

## Day 1: Surgeries

Patients check-in on for their consultation and initial eye exam. Patients requiring surgery will receive treatment today or the following day.



Patients with cataracts are easy to identify as the lens is clearly cloudy. This patient is blind in both eyes and will have surgery on the left eye first. Her clouded lens will be removed and replaced with one from Aurolab.



On the day of our visit 10 patients are scheduled for surgery. Here the queue for their turn in the in operating room.





Prior to entering the operating room, patients are prepped for surgery, which includes a local anesthesia injection into the eye. Child patients receive a general anesthesia as they are less able to deal with the pain, and more likely to move during the operation.



Each surgery takes around 10 minutes. The cataract procedure here uses knives instead of the advanced electronic equipment used in western countries but the effect is the same.



Dr. Taug Bin Eang works at both BEU and BOC. Today he will perform 10 surgeries in less than two hours. Prior to beginning surgery this morning he has already inspected and discharged 10 patients who had successful surgery yesterday.



With three people working in the surgery room (three on the left), the operating room is a model of efficiency. One performs surgery, another assists, and a third is responsible for preparing the next patient and managing the transition of patients from the table.



## Day 2: Bandages Off

At 6am on the morning following surgery, bandaged patients wake up in one of the recovery rooms.



The vast majority of patients at BEU are older, but on the day of our visit, one child is also receiving treatment.





The bandages are about to come off for this patient. She has been blind for so long she can't remember when she last had vision or what it was like. This will change in a few moments when her bandage is removed.



A patient is un-banded and opens her eyes for the first time, sees a white brick ceiling and a fluorescent light, smiles and exclaims something in Cambodian we don't understand. We ask for a translation and are told she said "it's so beautiful!"



This patient, previously blind in both eyes, begins laughing and smiling the moment the bandages come off. His joy is uncontrollable for the following two hours before we leave the facility.



Once the bandages are off, patients are taken for an eye exam to make sure their vision is properly restored.





A patient passes the eye exam as other patients watch with excitement. He has been smiling all morning, so we are not surprised that he passes easily.



One patient is told that some people from SEVA and its supporters from Focusing Philanthropy are here to observe the progress of the patients. She turns to the cadre after passing her vision test and gives a universally recognizable gesture that requires no translation.

