



## Unwavering dedication

*Dr Grace Lau Yuk-fung and Dr Paul Wong Kin-shing — their endeavour for better medical service in Cambodia*

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A poster of a starving child. News of ongoing war in Syria. We are often disturbed and moved by such images in the media, but how many of us have actually considered travelling to those places and helping those in need? Dr Grace Lau (MBBS 1988), a gynaecologist and obstetrician, and Dr Paul Wong (MBBS 1985), a nephrologist, are two such people, whose work and dedication inspired, and continue to inspire, many individuals. In the past 4 years (2009-2013), the family (together with their two children) have been serving in Cambodia as missionary doctors.

Dr Paul Wong was with Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital since its establishment and was in charge of setting up the renal dialysis unit there. Dr Grace Lau was in private practice. She continues to see patients once a week when she is in Hong Kong, especially those who insist on being examined by her.

### From vision to action

Both Dr Lau and Dr Wong wished to go abroad for community service ever since they were medical students at the University of Hong Kong. They wanted to use their knowledge and skills as doctors to help others, not only those in Hong Kong, but also the under-privileged people in developing countries. Since 1995, they have been members of short-term medical teams organised every year by their church, to serve the villagers in Cambodia. After practising thus for 14 years, their passion to serve the Cambodian people was further enhanced. In 2009,

they decided to commit to serve on site as long-term missionary doctors.

They understood the difference in service that they could make by moving to live there. They found that they could better recognise the needs and mentality of local Cambodian patients if they were immersed in their culture and language. The best way to effectively mentor local young doctors and medical students was walking and working alongside them, so that they could create a deeper impact on their values, and build good ethics in their medical practice.

### Cambodia — a broken nation

Cambodia is a nation with a broken past. The Vietnam War, civil war and the Khmer Rouge regime's purges in the 1970s left the country in tatters. Nearly two million Cambodians lost their lives during that period. Thousands more were killed or maimed by landmines left behind from that era.

In 1993, Cambodia started its reconstruction with help from many countries and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The country faced problems such as poverty, human trafficking, lack of education, and inflation. Medical and healthcare needs were tremendous. With poor hygiene and lack of clean water, tuberculosis and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infections are still dire problems, with the prevalence of HIV being especially high (14%) among female sex workers. Today, Cambodia remains one of the poorest countries in the world.

## Holistic care with scarce resources **A message to all**

Dr Wong and Dr Lau have been working in Mercy Medical Centre (MMC), an establishment built 10 years ago by a Christian NGO from the United States. Run by predominantly volunteer healthcare workers from different countries, the clinic provides holistic, quality medical care to poor patients from all over Cambodia.

Due to resource limitations, certain treatable illnesses are not curable in that setting. However, with a holistic approach, all patients are treated with respect and dignity. A patient with advanced cancer would rather pass away with dignity in MMC than seek help from local hospitals. These experiences clearly illustrate that advanced technology is not everything when it comes to treating patients; serving with respect and compassion is equally, if not more, important.

When asked what advice they would offer current medical students and fresh medical graduates, both doctors expressed an unfaltering and resolute view. “Here in Hong Kong, doctors and healthcare professionals are provided with high-quality training. We should think of ways outside our work area where we can share our expertise and resources to serve others. Think about what being a healthcare professional really means to you,” said Dr Lau.

Dr Wong quoted the words of Jesus: It is more blessed to give than to receive (施比受更為有福). He said, “The happiness from satisfying one’s ego isn’t long-lasting at all. It is by sharing what we have and touching the lives of others that we enjoy the utmost bliss. Everyone has a calling in life. We have found our calling and it has unceasingly enriched our lives.”

### Tackling the source

Due to the fact that many of Cambodia’s medical problems are iatrogenic, Dr Lau and Dr Wong collaborated with several other doctors to organise a course in family medicine in the hope of training young local doctors to be safe doctors. It turned out to be a popular course, and they continued to expand on this as one of the many tasks for bettering the medical system. Through small-group teaching and journeying with medical students, they were able to exert personal influence on medical students and impact their values and attitudes in caring for patients.

### Life lessons

Through their work in Cambodia, they established a closer relationship with God. They realised that things may not go as planned, that many things are beyond their capacity, and that sometimes, they simply have no control over certain factors. This humbling experience led them to depend more on prayers and divine guidance.

### Future plans

Dr Lau and Dr Wong plan to return to Cambodia in July 2014. Although both doctors are specialists, they try to cater to the primary care needs of the Cambodians. They have ideas about further exploring community-based primary care and providing more holistic hospital training. On the other hand, Dr Wong also has thoughts about setting up a dialysis unit. All their plans require immense manpower and resources. They sincerely urge the community of doctors, nurses, medical students, and other healthcare professionals to lend a helping hand by sharing their talent and knowledge in health education, teaching, and managing mobile clinics.



(Facing page)  
Dr Wong teaching physical examination skills to young doctors in Cambodia

(Top)  
Dr Lau and Dr Wong supervising medical students in a village outreach clinic in Cambodia

(Middle)  
Dr Lau performing hysterectomy on a Cambodian patient

(Bottom)  
Dr Wong seeing a patient in Mercy Medical Centre in Cambodia