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→ **Empowering Healthcare Professionals: Building the Capacity of Rehabilitation Workforce in Laos** ←



USAID Okard, together with health partners from the Center of Medical and Rehabilitation (CMR), the Cooperative Orthotic and Prosthetic Enterprise (COPE), and the Department of Healthcare and Rehabilitation (DHR), Ministry of Health, has reached a new milestone in building the capacity of the rehabilitation workforce in Laos. This second quarter of the year 6 noted continued capacity building through training and coaching for the health workforce to strengthen the health system on rehabilitation. Through a series of trainings in Laos and a regional visit to Vietnam, health professionals are empowered to provide quality rehabilitation services to their communities.

One of the key achievements of this quarter has been the training conducted by CMR, technically supported by USAID Okard partner, COPE, on special wheelchair and seating system provision. This training is a direct result of a previous collaboration with the International Society of Wheelchair Professionals (ISWP) that trained core trainers from CMR on the World Health Organization (WHO) Wheelchair Service Training Package Intermediate Level supported by USAID Okard. Staff from Provincial Rehabilitation Sub Centers (PRSCs) that completed the training are now equipped with the knowledge and skills

to provide specialized wheelchair and seating services, enabling expansion of services to four additional Provincial Rehabilitation Sub Centers (PRSCs) in Savannakhet, Champasack, Luangprabang and Xieng Khouang so children requiring specialized seating can access services closer to their homes.

Furthermore, the core trainers of the CMR Continued Professional Development (CPD) Training Facility that received training from the Faculty of Medicine, Department of Rehabilitation at Chiang Mai University, Thailand are now using their knowledge and skills to deliver training to healthcare workers including doctors, nurses, and physiotherapists from district and provincial hospitals in Xieng Khouang and Savannakhet, and central hospitals in Vientiane Capital. Training will include a series of modules as an introduction to rehabilitation, how to provide routine assistive products for mobility, self-considering environmental modifications, and referral for specialized assistive products including Prosthetics and Orthotics (P&O) so healthcare workers can provide quality, essential rehabilitation interventions for people with difficulties in functioning, including people with disabilities to increase independence and improve quality of life.

During a regional visit in Hanoi and Hue, Vietnam in February and March 2023, the Lao delegation led by DHR, including leadership from MoH departments, central and provincial health facilities, and University of Health Sciences (UHS), were able to deepen their knowledge on different aspects of rehabilitation connected to the five pillars of the Lao health system and their respective roles. DHR gained a better understanding of Universal Health Coverage and Health Insurance schemes so rehabilitation can be provided free of cost. UHS learned about how new Bachelor and Master's Degree programs have been designed and commenced to train faculty lecturers and a generation of occupational therapists and speech and language therapists to expand the rehabilitation multidisciplinary team in hospitals. CMR, central and provincial hospital leadership while visiting general and specialized hospitals gained insight on referral pathways, availability and accessibility of quality rehabilitation services, including a range of basic and specialized interventions including provision of assistive products focusing on activities of daily living to improve functioning.

This quarter has been a testament to the hard work and dedication of our partners, as well as the health professionals who have participated in the training programs. We are proud to be part of this effort to build the capacity of the rehabilitation workforce in Laos and look forward to continuing our work in this area.

Photo 1: Sibounheung from CMR conducted a training session on P&O - Photo credit: Souliya Ounavong - USAID Okard Communication and Liaison Officer

Photo 2: Real time practice on assistive products by participants - Photo credit: Souliya Ounavong - USAID Okard Communication and Liaison Officer

Photo 3: Lao delegation visited to Vietnam on Health Rehabilitation Facilities - Photo credit: Souliya Ounavong - USAID Okard Communication and Liaison Officer

Photo 4: Special wheelchair and seating system provision training by the Center for Medical Rehabilitation, technically supported by USAID Okard partner COPE - Photo credit: COPE