



# From Angkor to Monash

In 2015, RACS and Monash Children's Hospital welcomed Surgeons International Award recipient, Dr Sophy Khan from Angkor Hospital for Children (AHC) in Siem Reap, Cambodia.



**MS ANNETTE HOLIAN**  
Chair, External Affairs

Growing up in rural Cambodia during the years of the brutal Khmer Rouge regime, young Sophy Khan contracted a nasal infection which became increasingly severe as his parents battled to seek medical treatment. The regime's persecution of intellectuals, educated professionals and individuals, meant that few educated Cambodian doctors remained in the country. Sophy's infection was left untreated for more than 3 years, causing him and his family great distress; this was until a doctor from the International Red Cross removed the foreign body from his nose.

From this marked childhood experience, becoming a surgeon was a natural progression for Sophy. He was strongly motivated to attend medical school and after successful completion of his studies in 1998, Dr Khan began his medical training at Sihanoukville Referral Hospital, 242km south-west of Phnom Penh.

Dr Khan quips that at the time, Sihanoukville Hospital was a '500 star' hospital, not because of any official rating. However, due to the fact that the hospital lacked roofing over particular areas, he explains, "one could see 1, 2, 3, 4, 5...500 stars!" Dr Khan also reminisces that the hospital and patients received many interesting visitors, including cows that would come to visit the wards, seeking shelter during the rainy season.

Dr Khan visited the Monash Children's Hospital in February – April 2015 and received training in paediatric urology under the supervision of paediatric surgeon A/Prof Chris Kimber FRACS. He has now applied the skills and knowledge acquired throughout his time at MCH directly

to his own work in Cambodia. Dr Khan believes that the training has resulted in overall better practice in handling urological cases including, VCUG management, hypospadias and pre- and post-op.

Dr Khan has worked at the Angkor Hospital for Children (AHC) for over 10 years and is passionate about helping disadvantaged children and families in the region. The vision of Dr Khan's hospital, the non-profit paediatric AHC, is to provide 'high-quality, compassionate care to Cambodia's children, wherever they live and whatever their ability to pay', with some of Cambodia's most vulnerable children falling under their wing.

For Dr Khan, improving access to safe and affordable care is key for children in Cambodia.

He also believes that the greatest challenges facing paediatric healthcare in Cambodia is improving the quality of care with the need for more training. In the long term, he wishes to achieve greater finesse in his skills and looks forward to teaching the new generation of Cambodian surgeons. His sage advice to future Surgeon International Awardees is to focus on improving their knowledge through intensive training, to provide the best quality of care in their home communities. We wish Dr Khan all the best in his future endeavours!

The Surgeons International Award was established in 1989 in order to provide access to further training opportunities for surgeons from lower to middle income countries. The objective of the award is to help recipients acquire the knowledge, skills and contacts needed for the promotion of improved health services in their home country. The Surgeons International Award has since enabled 67 health professionals from different backgrounds to undertake short-term visits to Australian and New Zealand hospitals. RACS Global Health warmly invites nominations of worthy individuals for a Surgeons International Award.

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*– With Gwyn Low, Global Health, RACS.*