



Dr. LEE Jong-wook-Seoul Project – Successful Korean Version of Minnesota Project – Could Be a Model of Partner in the Field of Medicine

Just after the Korean War, all the big hospitals and medical facilities were destroyed in Korea. Western countries who participated as an allied army helped Korea in medical field in two ways. One was the direct dispatch of the doctors who treated the patients in the newly built hospital named National Medical Center with the help of northern European countries. The other one was the invitation of more than 70 young doctors who worked at the Seoul National University College of Medicine to University of Minnesota in the USA to train the basic science and clinical activities for more than one year with the name of Minnesota Project (Seoul National University Cooperation Project). Scandinavian doctors played a great role at National Medical Center introducing modern techniques in the fields of surgery and many new treatment modalities to Korea. But after they returned home, the activity of the National Medical Center decreased gradually as other big hospitals took its place. Instead, Minnesota Project showed its enormous effects gradually over time after the cessation of the 6 year program in early sixties. Residency program for training of young doctors was introduced to replace the old apprentice style Japanese medical education and surgical department was subdivided like the hospitals in USA into orthopedic, neurosurgery, urology etc. The facilities supplied when they returned to Korea were also very useful for the introduction of modern treatment. Concepts of public health were introduced to the family planning and sanitation for the prevention of disease. With the rapid socioeconomic growth, medicine in Korea developed very rapidly that nowadays big hospitals in Korea showed a comparable treatment results to the top ten hospitals in USA and all these quick advances could be attributed to the outcome of Minnesota project.

Korea became one of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries in 2009. This was the first case that the country helped by others became the country which could help the others in less than 60 years. Seoul National University College of Medicine participated from 2010 with the Ministry of Health & Welfare and Korean Foundation for International Health (KOFIH) in Official Development Aid program with the name of Dr. LEE Jong-wook-Seoul Project on purpose of giving back the help from Minnesota Project to other country who needs help. Seoul Project was a nine year program and consisted of four parts. The first was inviting 10 doctors from University of Health Sciences of Lao PDR every year for one year training. The second was supplying the facilities when the trainees returned to their country for to educate students and treat the patients in hospital. The third was dispatching senior consultant in the field they needed to Lao PDR to diagnose the situation, give opinions for the policy, and deliver lectures for the students. The last was improving the environment for an adequate medical education to the students by constructing e-library service and internet facilities in the campus in addition to improving the facilities in the hospital such as the clinic for the childhood cancer. Three doctors finished their training in the field of pediatric hematology and oncology and they started to treat more than 30 childhood leukemia patients with these facilities and chemotherapeutic drugs supplied from Korea. The first survivor of acute lymphoblastic leukemia sustained remission for more than 30 months and this was the first case of pediatric cancer who survived in Lao PDR. Protocols were developed to overcome the limited resources setting and these were possible as the Korean doctors experienced these circumstances 30 years ago. New program for using the trainees who returned to Lao as teachers for the doctors from provincial hospitals would be launched this year.

What we have learned from Seoul Project is that we should not use the term “donor”. Instead, we should use the term “partner” for the successful program. The word “gap” between the countries should be changed to “difference” between the countries. Seoul Project is running two workshops a year, once in Lao and once in Korea which is called Scientific Communication Workshop. With these workshops, Korean doctors delivered many new things to Lao but also learned a great amount of knowledge about the treatment in limited resources setting. As the professors visited Lao to meet the trainee before starting

the training in Korea, the professors acquired a situation in Lao and they train the doctors from Lao with the concept of treatment in limited resources settings which they experienced already in Korea about thirty years ago. Medical knowledge was not sufficient for the program to succeed. Cultural experiences such as Korean traditional cultures, costumes, foods, sports like baseball, and broadcasting company tour to see the K-pop were also important to make good memories and Korean language was essential for the completed and sustainable outcome. They were also exposed to some Korean pharmaceutical companies and medical facilities companies through the factories tour program. Trainees were also cared after they returned to Lao with the facilities support and consultation with senior consultant dispatched from Korea. They made alumni association of Seoul Project.

As a donor country, Korea dispatched medical teams to see the patients in developing countries for one or two weeks and the time was not enough. Therefore, it should be changed to programs that can initiate sustainable changes in these countries. Just the communication in the field of medicine itself was not enough and medicine should be widened to all the fields of medicine such as health policy, pharmaceuticals, medical machines and paramedics. Performing these programs, we should always be humble to have the idea that we are the partners in the global issue.

ORCID

Hee Young Shin <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2091-1947>

Hee Young Shin, MD

Department of Pediatrics, Seoul National University College of Medicine,
103 Daehak-ro, Jongno-gu, Seoul 03080, Korea
Tel: +82.2-2072-2917, Fax: +82.2-3675-0999, E-mail: hyshin@snu.ac.kr