

## **VIETNAM Overseas Doctors Help Poor Parish With Medical Treatment**

**HUE**, Vietnam (UCAN) -- Nuns in a central Vietnam parish have helped poor local people obtain free medical treatment from Canadian doctors, some of them ethnic Vietnamese, who recently made a sixth visit to the area.

"I am very happy to see things better, though I find it a bit uncomfortable to wear glasses," Phan Thi Loai told UCA News with a smile. The 83-year-old woman, who is not a Catholic, blamed years of diving into the river to fish and collect scallops for the eye problems she, her children and many other local people suffer.

Her three children also were among the 1,239 people who received free medical checkups and treatment March 3-4 at a camp run by 20 Canadians, six of them ethnic Vietnamese.

Those who came for the camp were mostly elderly women and children who traveled by foot or boat, or were brought on bicycles. It was held at the day-care center run by Daughters of Our Lady of the Visitation nuns near the Kim Doi parish church, 670 kilometers south of Ha Noi.

Some of the nuns told UCA News they invited Vietnamese doctors they knew in Canada to come offer medical care for local people. This was the sixth time the doctors visited Kim Doi parish, the first being in 1996. Fourteen nuns helped the doctors with the checkups and distribution of medicine.

The nuns said local authorities made lists of patients to receive medical treatment, irrespective of religion, and give them to the nuns a week before the Canadian doctors arrived. Only those on the lists received medical attention. The visitors also provided money for some people to have operations in hospitals.

Sister Anna Le Thi Hue, superior of the convent in Kim Doi, told UCA News that she made a list of 18 children, ranging in age from one month to 12 years, who require heart surgery.

Tran Thi Bach, a fifth grader who was given 42 million dong (US\$2,620) for her heart surgery, expressed gratitude. "I hope I will be better so I can do my studies at school," the girl added. Bach, who is not a Catholic said she, her parents and five brothers and sisters earn 1 million dong a month collecting trash.

Ignatius Nguyen Yem said he too is grateful, because his grandson can now undergo heart surgery with the 25 million dong the visitors gave him. He said he is too poor to afford that kind of money for the operation.

The visiting doctors conducted minor medical procedures themselves.

Anna Nguyen Thi Rieng, a 76-year-old woman who lives alone and earns 150,000 dong a month as a fruit vendor, said a dentist at the medical camp extracted two teeth that had tormented her for months. "Without him, I would have stayed in a lot of pain, since I do not have enough money to afford a dentist," she told UCA News.

Village head Truong Le told UCA News that people in the area of Kim Doi suffer various ailments because they use polluted water. Moreover, the area was controlled by communists before 1975 and was a target for American chemical bombs during the Vietnam War. People still suffer from its aftereffects, he said.

Le, 62, also complained that in recent years rivers and lakes were polluted by pesticides local farmers pour into them after they spray their rice fields.

Truong Huu Tam, who went to the medical camp, told UCA News he once cultivated prawns, but they perished because of the polluted water. "I am very sad that my family is deep in debt," said the 53-year-old man, who received treatment for his eyes, stomachache and kidney stones.

Father Paul Ngo Thanh Son, the Kim Doi parish priest, told UCA News his parishioners live mainly on rice crops and lack proper food six months of the year. They have many children and live in poor conditions, he added.

Canadian Father Antoine Tran Manh Tien, an ethnic Vietnamese who has come with doctors 13 times to various places in Vietnam, said the doctors want to do something good for poor people in Vietnam. He said a group would visit Kim Doi twice a year from this year. They travel and donate their own money, he explained, adding that they had donated some modern medical equipment to a state-run hospital in Hue, central Vietnam.

Andrew Chan, the Chinese-Canadian dentist who extracted Rieng's teeth, told UCA News he is not a Catholic but admires Catholics for their charity.