

Myanmar Child Cancer Project



Project Locations in Myanmar:

Yangon Children's Hospital, Yangon
Mandalay Children's Hospital, Mandalay

Twinning Hospitals from High Income Countries:

Boston Children's Hospital/Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, US
Guy's St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, London, UK

Local Project Leader: Dr Aye Aye Khaing

Timescale:

Stage 1 – The project has been in development since 2012. A needs assessment visit will take place in October 2013.

Stage 2 – Full project funding is due to start in January 2014.

Expected no. of cases in region: 1,200 to 2,300 per year

Context

Myanmar is a low income country with a population of 48 million people. The majority of people live in poverty. The country has been ruled by a military dictatorship for many years but has recently started significant political and economic reforms. There are an estimated 1,200 - 2,300 new cases of childhood cancer annually (based on 80-150 cases per million children). Accurate figures are not available because there is no national population-based registry.

Yangon and Mandalay Children's Hospitals are the only treatment centres for paediatric oncology in Myanmar. They are government-funded with patients receiving treatment free of charge but families are required to fund drug costs. Both hospitals have dedicated paediatric oncology wards with Yangon having better facilities including radiotherapy, pathology and the preparation of blood products. In 2012 Yangon diagnosed 260 children. No figures are available for Mandalay.

Paediatric oncology care in Myanmar was established by Dr Aye Aye Khaing in 2002. Over the last decade Dr Khaing and her team have made significant progress. However, long term survival rates remain low and there are still considerable challenges including:

- Late diagnosis (70%) and non-diagnosis due to lack of awareness amongst parents and healthcare professionals;
- Too few trained doctors and nurses to provide specialist care for children with cancer;
- Lack of appropriate treatment protocols lead to high rate of disease relapse;
- High death rate from infections;
- High rate of abandonment (40%) of treatment due to unaffordability of drugs;
- Limited provision of palliative care and effective pain relief.

Strategic Objectives 2013 - 2017

1. To increase survival rates for children with cancer at Yangon Children's Hospital and Mandalay Children's Hospital by improving the quality of care.
2. To share knowledge, technology and organisational skills through training with the twinning hospitals in the UK and USA and to develop locally appropriate treatment protocols.
3. To reduce abandonment of treatment by improving drug availability and improving information for parents.
4. To raise awareness of child cancer, its symptoms and curability amongst public and healthcare professionals.
5. To increase access to care with more children receiving curative and palliative treatment.
6. To improve the collection of statistical data on child cancer incidence and outcomes.

Activities

- Develop on-site and online training programme for healthcare professionals in Myanmar with focus on diagnostic techniques, supportive care, palliative care, curative treatment and clinical management.
- Develop reliable and affordable supplies of chemotherapy and palliative care drugs.
- Develop an online child cancer database at Yangon and Mandalay Children's Hospitals.
- Raise awareness about childhood cancer through public health education campaigns.
- Improve social support and education for families to reduce abandonment of treatment.

Key People:

Dr Aye Aye Khaing is a qualified paediatric oncologist and the local project leader.

Robert Carr is a consultant haematologist at Guy's St Thomas' Hospital in London.

Carlos Rodriguez-Galindo & Lindsay Frazier are consultant paediatric oncologists from Boston Children's Hospital.

Lisa Morrissey is a senior paediatric oncology nurse from Boston Children's Hospital.