

Politics and palliative care: Cambodia

Dion Smyth's review of the internet for palliative nursing

For many of us, an awareness of the political affairs of Cambodia was awakened by the film *'The Killing Fields'*, which vividly portrayed both the violence and the vitality of the people of that troubled nation under the repression of the Khmer Rouge. For the last 20 years, Cambodia has been slowly recovering from the despotism of Pol Pot's regime and the occupation by its neighbour Vietnam, with economic growth based on textiles and tourism; the country boasts the World Heritage Angkor Wat temple complex among its portfolio of sites to visit.

The Kingdom of Cambodia, or Kampuchea, is governed as a constitutional monarchy with a democratically elected bicameral legislature; nevertheless, according to the CIA World Fact Book, Cambodia remains one of the most deprived countries in Asia. Long-term fiscal development remains a formidable challenge, hindered partly by 'endemic corruption, limited educational opportunities, high income inequality, and poor job prospects'.



<http://www.norodomsihamoni.org/>

The official website of the constitutional head of state, the King of Cambodia, His Majesty Norodom Sihamoni, is a sparse affair, which has little to offer other than a few photos of palace life and some biographical details.

<http://www.moh.gov.kh/?lang=en>

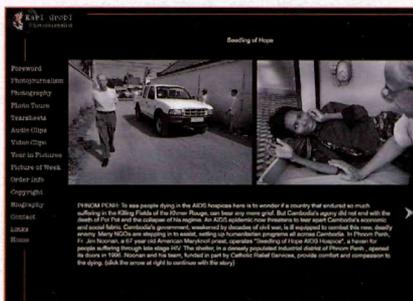
The web presence of the Cambodian Ministry of Health is a perplexing



thing. A search of 'hospice' and 'palliative care' suggests there is no information under those headings, and when you search for morbidity and mortality listings in the left-hand links, more often than not you are met by the cheery but frustrating message: 'No available information yet... Please back again, thank you!!!'

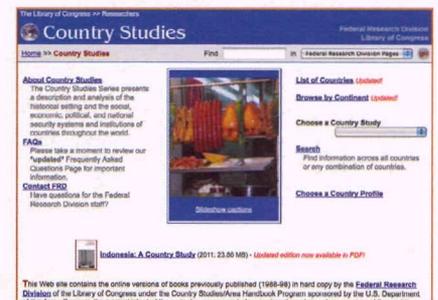
<http://bit.ly/17Gocel>

This paper, from the French organisation Douleurs Sans Frontières or Pain Without Borders, highlights the presently parlous state of palliative care services in this poor region, with only one cancer centre within the capital, Phnom Penh, providing expertise, care, and beds for the population. Education and improvement of internal services are planned to develop a more self-sufficient service; however, it is curious that a search on Google for 'palliative care/hospice care and Cambodia' reveals more about Cambodia being the ultimate destination for fundraising events for charities in the UK.



<http://www.karlgrobl.com/Photojournalism/Seedling/page1.htm>

This website is possibly one of the most affecting and effective sites I have seen. It achieves simplicity of message by combining minimal text with stark black-and-white reportage photography to highlight the needs of patients living with HIV and AIDS in Cambodia. The brief narrative describes the work of one of the Catholic charitable institutions in this deprived and neglected community and the heartbreakingly pitiful stories of those living with the disease. Some of the images are both truly beautiful and haunting.



<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/>

The US Library of Congress Country Studies website is useful for researching a nation state, especially in this case given that one of the sponsors was the US Department of the Army and the facts were being collected in case US forces were deployed in the region. Many of the pages require an update and it may be that the utility of sites such as this will fade as more dynamic sites supersede them; nonetheless, there are still useful facts to be found in such a resource.

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