



Newsletter

Swiss International Pediatric Project Summer 2020

SWISSMONGOLIANPEDIATRICPROJECT SMOPP

SWISSTAJIKPEDIATRICPROJECT STAPP



The coronavirus epidemic has turned all our lives upside down and imposed severe restrictions on us all. Switzerland and other privileged states are getting off comparatively lightly. We can rely on stable economic conditions, a high-quality healthcare system and sustainable social insurance systems. Emerging and developing countries such as Mongolia have to react differently and prepare for more serious cuts.

What influence the pandemic has on the activities of SMOPP and why these are now even more important than usual is explained by our two Mongolian team leaders Dr. Bayalag Munkhuu and Dr. Munhtulga Ulziibat in the following interview.

Please take a few minutes for reading the interview.

SMOPP is part of the Swiss International Pediatric Project SIPP

Interview with Dr. Bayalag and Dr. Tulгаа



Our two Mongolian team leaders
Dr. Bayalag (right) and Dr. Tulгаа
(left)

If one looks at the number of COVID-19 patients and infected persons (less than 300 positively tested by mid-July 2020, no deaths so far), it can be said that Mongolia is doing an excellent job. How can this be explained?

The Mongolian government effectively closed the borders at a very early stage and restricted the travel activities of the population. Since the end of January 2020, international flights or train connections to and from the neighboring countries China and Russia and other foreign countries have been cancelled. Anyone who wants to enter or has been repatriated has to go into strict and controlled quarantine for 3 weeks and is tested for the virus. Domestic travel is also subject to severe restrictions. Public events, events for sports and culture, as well as tourist activities are cancelled. Thanks to this rigorous strategy, the spread of the virus throughout the country has been prevented, and all persons who tested positive were identified and isolated on entry. The WHO recommendations (wearing a mask, keeping distance, hygiene measures, etc.) are mandatory and the implementation is monitored.

What restrictions and consequences affect families with children?

Schools, kindergartens, day care centers and universities were already closed on 27 January. Opening is not planned before autumn. Over 900,000 children and young people under 18 years of age must therefore be supervised and looked after at home, as far as possible. In many cases, however, children remain without supervision and are left alone. Many parents have already lost their jobs. Especially in poor families, children are threatened by hunger, neglect and domestic violence.

How is the economic situation in the country?

The corona pandemic related restrictions have a massive impact. Various economic sectors are under heavy pressure. The social and economic consequences for the Mongolian population



Poor man in the streets of Ulaanbaatar trying to get some money from passers-by for weight checks on his scales

cannot yet be assessed. Unemployment is rising sharply and the already high poverty rate (according to the World Bank, 40-50% of the Mongolian population are living below or on the poverty line) is increasing rapidly. Unfortunately, national pension schemes are lacking and social networks are hardly sustainable. The entire burden of financial provision therefore rests on the families. Although the state tries to alleviate these burdens, financial resources are limited. The prospects are unfortunately very poor!

Mongolia obviously has vital problems. Does it make sense to continue the SMOP project?

Under these conditions, prevention is more important than ever! Surgical treatments are expensive, if they can be offered in Mongolia itself in sufficient quality at all. Most families simply cannot afford a child with a disability or treatment! Those who cannot walk or can only walk poorly are even more disadvantaged here than in highly developed countries. Physical health is an absolute survival factor! Our doctors have the duty to give every child the best possible chances. In this sense, the hip project is a prime example: with simple means and at no cost to the families, a serious health problem can be identified and safely treated. We will do everything in our power to push the project forward and to extend it to the whole nation in accordance with the mandate of the Ministry of Health.

Can the financing of the project be secured from the Mongolian side in the future?

Nomadic ger in rural Mongolia, house of 3 generations and up to 8 or more people



The national Ministry of Health has taken over the supervision of the screening program and commissioned its implementation. However, no financial support is expected. With a budget of less than USD 150 for health costs per inhabitant and year (compared to Switzerland 2017: USD 10,000), there is no room for manoeuvre. And, as mentioned above, the financial conditions have again deteriorated massively in the context of the corona crisis. We remain fully dependent on support. Without it, the hip screening program will not be able to continue. We are therefore extremely grateful for the support of SMOPP.

The Swiss SMOPP team is currently unable to travel to Mongolia. How is cooperation still possible?



Mongolian pediatrician performing hip ultrasound with the materials provided by SIPP

Thanks to the existing structures and the internet-based documentation system, we can guarantee the complete exchange of information nationally and in exchange with Switzerland. Hip ultrasound screening has become routine in all bigger maternity wards throughout the country. The quality of diagnostics and therapy is guaranteed. Despite the corona restrictions, the work within the project will therefore continue unchanged and over 80% of all newborns in Mongolia already benefit from hip ultrasound.

However, because domestic travel is currently practically impossible, the expansion to rural areas is unfortunately being delayed. We want to achieve this goal in the next few years, which will involve a great deal of effort.

Any wishes you might want to send to Switzerland?

In our view, SMOPP is a prime example of sustainable, meaningful development promotion. The doctors of Mongolia are given the opportunity and competence to solve a highly relevant health problem simply and safely. This enables a permanent exchange of knowledge. More than 5000 children have already been saved from a disability by curing their hip dysplasia. Based on these findings, our wish is to extend the support under any circumstances! The strategy has proven to be effective and the structures are sustainable. We must continue along the path we have chosen. Unfortunately, we cannot do so without the aid provided by SMOPP.

On behalf of the children and families of Mongolia, as well as on behalf of the hospitals and the Ministry of Health, we would like to thank all donors and the Swiss SMOPP team from the bottom of our hearts!



Call for donations

To survive, the project needs your support! With your donation you can give the chance of a better life to Mongolian children.
Your appreciated financial contribution is tax deductible.

Further information: www.sipp.swiss

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