

Developing tropical medicine research in South East Asia

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In 1979 the Wellcome Trust supported formation of a tropical medicine collaboration between the Faculty of Tropical Medicine, Mahidol University in Thailand and Oxford University in the UK. This small programme worked initially on malaria, rabies and snake bite in rural Thailand. In 1986 there was a change in direction with opening of community based studies of malaria on the Western border of Thailand, and the beginning of research on melioidosis in the North East of the country. In 1991 a research collaboration started in the Hospital for Tropical Diseases, Ho Chi Minh city, Vietnam studying malaria, tetanus, typhoid, dengue, diphtheria and later meningitis and encephalitis. Recently this unit has become the leading centre for clinical research on avian influenza, In 2000 a research collaboration started with Mahosot hospital, Vientiane, Laos (malaria, typhoid, septicaemia, meningitis, rickettsial disease). The research has focused on infectious diseases of local and international importance, and has endeavoured to find practical solutions to management. Integration with the host institutions, scientific and operational independence, flexibility, responsiveness, and a multidisciplinary approach have been central to success.