

The King who Cares

The King and Public Health: part 1

In the opening section, we find out why His Majesty the King took such a personal interest in the health care of his people. We also find out the **approach** he used to bring about major changes in the system, especially in caring for the **rural** poor in **remote** areas.



Your job is to read this opening section to find out (1) what the traditional attitude of health officials towards treating their patients was. (2) How was the King able to change it? (3) Did the King simply order government health officials to change their ways or did he use a more indirect method to bring about change? Explain.

approach – a particular way of dealing with a problem

rural – areas away from cities, especially agricultural or forest areas

remote – areas far away from cities and places where most people live

prominent – very important

pioneering – doing something that has not been done before

dedicated – working very hard at something because it is very important to you

plight – a difficult or distressing situation that is full of problems

tenaciously – in a very determined way; refusing to give up easily

followed in the footsteps – did the same work or activity as someone else did before

ardent – having extremely strong feelings about something or someone

advocate – someone who publicly supports something

compassionate – showing or feeling pity, sympathy and understanding for people who are suffering

champion – a supporter

scarce – not having enough of something

malnourished – physically weak because of not getting enough good food

desperate – in a very bad situation and willing to try anything to change it

fundamental – basic

mobile – moving or traveling from place to place

groundwork – early work which forms the basis for further work

Born into a family of medical professionals, health and medicine had always been prominent in His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej's childhood. His father, HRH Prince Mahidol of Songkhla, was a pioneering doctor who dedicated his life to the plight of the rural poor. He initiated numerous healthcare programmes that brought medical care to the far reaches of the provinces, where modern medicine had previously been unheard of.

His mother, the late Princess Mother, was a trained nurse who tenaciously supported her husband's causes. After the death of Prince Mahidol, she continued to carry out his work and started numerous public health programmes.

Growing up against a backdrop of dedication and service to public health, it comes as no surprise that His Majesty the King has followed in the footsteps of his parents and is an ardent advocate of health and medical concerns. While His Majesty, in recent years, is seen as being more active in areas such as rural development, water conservation and the environment, he has remained a compassionate champion of issues related to health and medicine since the end of World War II.

At that time, state-run medical facilities in the provinces were scarce and under-developed. "During His Majesty's frequent visits to rural areas, he would come across sick, malnourished people or those suffering from malaria who were desperate for medical attention and did not know where to get help," says Magsaysay Award recipient Dr Prawase Wasi.

"Since then His Majesty has traveled with a team of doctors and nurses to treat those who come to him with their illness. When he meets someone with a serious disease, he will write down their names before sending them off to the hospital. He's been doing this for years. It gives people great hope to see him. It's a cause that has stayed close to the King's heart," says Dr Prawase.

His Majesty's actions prompted a fundamental change in the attitude of healthcare authorities, says Dr Prawase. In the past the attitude and practice was that the ill had to go to hospital for treatment. By taking mobile medical teams with him wherever he went, His Majesty changed this attitude. "Medical professionals saw that they had to go out to the sick and not wait for them to come to the hospital. This led directly to changes in the structure of the healthcare delivery structure by the Public Health Ministry."

"[Doctors and health care officials] began to realise that medical treatment and public health care had to be distributed because that was the only way it could reach the people. They realised volunteers, health workers and nurses should play a role in this. This was the groundwork for what is now called 'basic healthcare work'. I think that the King played a great role here in changing attitudes. And he did it without giving orders but by setting an example."

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The King and Public Health: part 2

In this part, we'll begin by reading about His Majesty's role in trying to **eradicate** three very serious diseases, **tuberculosis**, **leprosy** and **polio**. Read to find out specifically how the King was involved in the efforts to first **contain** and then reduce and, in one case, to almost completely **eliminate** the disease from Thailand

eradicate – to completely get rid of something bad; to **eliminate**

tuberculosis – a serious lung disease

leprosy – a serious disease that affects and damages people's skin and flesh

polio – a serious disease that often makes people unable to use their legs

contain – to keep under control and prevent from spreading

reduce – to make less

instrumental – involved in helping a process or an event happen

dreaded – terrible and greatly feared

sanatorium – a hospital where people who have long lasting diseases can stay and be cared for

rampant – (of something bad) very common and increasing in an uncontrolled way

incidence – the frequency with which something occurs

spearheaded – led, especially a campaign or an attack

stricken – severely affected by an illness, natural disaster, etc.

inoculate – to inject a weak form of a disease into a person's body to protect them against the disease

contracted – became ill with a disease

Apart from the official attitude to healthcare, His Majesty was also instrumental in encouraging villagers to care for themselves, first by adopting basic preventive healthcare measures rather than waiting until they fell ill. Wherever he went, His Majesty would advise rural residents on how they could take care of themselves.

Apart from being instrumental in changing attitudes and actively assisting national health programmes, His Majesty has played a direct role in assisting the eradication of several diseases that were widespread in the country. After the Second World War, former public health minister Dr Sem Pringpuangkaew explains, the country's most dreaded disease was tuberculosis.

“The state did not know how to contain the disease because at that time there weren't any sanatoriums to house those infected. The King, however, took a personal interest and set up the Anti-Tuberculosis Society to help prevent the disease from spreading,” he recalls.

With a personal donation to the Red Cross Science Division, the Mahidol Wongsanusorn building was constructed in 1950 to produce BCG vaccines. UNICEF later bought the vaccines for use in other Asian countries.

His Majesty was also instrumental in eradicating leprosy. Dr Sawasdi Daengsawang, then the director general of Public Health, was one of the first to turn to His Majesty when the disease became rampant in the mid-1950s. “I asked the King for help because at the time leprosy was spreading so quickly that in some cases in the

Northeast, entire villages were becoming infected.”

“In 1955 leprosy was everywhere in the streets,” says Khwankeo Vajarodaya, Grand Chamberlain of the Royal Household Bureau. “The Public Health Ministry had a plan to bring it under control in 12 years, but the King wanted it tackled much faster. A doctor told him that it could be done in eight years if there was an institution to train more professionals. So His Majesty set up the Rajaprasamasai Foundation which also served as a research and development centre.

“His foundation is directly responsible for dramatically bringing down the incidence of leprosy,” says Mr Khwankeo.

Dr Vichai Chokevivat, Deputy Director-General of the Communicable Disease Control Department, agrees that His Majesty played a significant role in eliminating polio from Thailand. Apart from private donations to set up the Polio Welfare Fund and building the Vajiralongkorn Tarabambat building at the King Mongkut Hospital, he spearheaded the drive to raise funds for vaccines. His Majesty used his volunteer radio to call on Thais for donations to buy equipment to help those stricken with polio.

The country responded. Mr Khwankeo notes that it was His Majesty who initiated the use of Jacuzzis to treat the disease and donated equipment to Siriraj Hospital.

Polio was later eliminated from Thailand. It reappeared in the 1990s following the influx of Cambodian refugees 10 years earlier. Dr Vichai says that a campaign launched to inoculate all Thai children against polio proved highly effective: Only one child was reported to have contracted the disease. The campaign continued for three years until polio was eliminated from the country once again. “We have to recognise that we have reached this stage because His Majesty the King took an interest in the well-being of his subjects,” the doctor says.

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The King and Public Health: part 3

In this part, we will read to the end of the public health section. Here you will find out about the King's involvement in many other areas of health care. (1) Make a list of what they are. (2) Which ones were begun by the King himself and which are a continuation of the work of the **late** Princess Mother? (3) Find examples of how the King takes a personal interest in these activities.

late – of someone who has died

beneficiary – someone who is helped by something

serum – the watery, pale yellow part of blood; a liquid that are injected into someone's blood to protect them against a poison or disease

saline drip – a liquid containing salt that is slowly dripped into an ill person's body

allocate – to give a share of something for a particular purpose, in this case, a share of time

granted an audience – allowed to have a meeting with a member of the royal family

immeasurable – so large as to be unable to be measured

advocate – someone who publicly supports something

pioneering – doing something that hasn't been done before

cure – to make a person well after suffering from a disease or injury

Since 1946, His Majesty has injected millions of baht of personal funds to assist numerous national healthcare programmes. The Thai Red Cross has been a primary beneficiary of HM's support, especially in its work producing vaccines and serums. In 1952 His Majesty set up a blood service centre which developed into the National Blood Service Centre in 1969.

At present the centre has branches throughout the country, saving thousands of lives each year. It produces saline drip for sale, while blood is distributed free of charge.

His Majesty has expanded the work of the Red Cross to cover the whole country. His Majesty has assisted in providing funding for research on diseases relating to hormones, bones and joints, the nervous system and the blood. He has set up a fund for medical research, a foundation to promote cleanliness and health among schoolchildren, and a vocational centre for soldiers and border patrol policemen who have been disabled while protecting the country.

In addition to His Majesty the King's commitment to addressing current and future healthcare needs is his belief in funding the future development of Thai medical professionals.

“There must be continuous training of people who are skilled and experienced in public health care”, says Dr Prawase.

The late Princess Mother saw the importance of this and used personal funds to send many Thais to study medicine overseas. Dr Klum Vacharobol, Dr Sri Sirising, Dr

Sawadi Sadaengsawang, Dr Luang Nit Vechavisit, and many other doctors who have become teachers of the medical profession were among recipients of the Princess Mother's support. These people went on to play a crucial role in laying the foundation of medical and public health work in Thailand.

His Majesty continued to support his mother's work by establishing the Ananda Mahidol Fund to send doctors to further their education overseas. Dr Charas Suwanvela, former president of Chulalongkorn University, was the first recipient. Later the fund became a foundation and is now open to public donations.

His Majesty allocates a considerable amount of time to the foundation, acting as its honorary chairman and paying great attention to its financing. Students under this foundation would be granted an audience with HM the King, during which they would be given invaluable advice before going overseas. On their return they would be granted another audience in which His Majesty would ask about what they had learnt. His Majesty would on occasion spend hours talking with them.

As a healthcare advocate, His Majesty the King's contributions remain immeasurable, and build upon the pioneering work of his late father and mother. Perhaps the best way to describe His Majesty's attitude towards health care would be to use his own words. During a visit to a tuberculosis treatment centre on April 6, 1950, HM said to then Health Minister Luang Payung Vejchasart, "Is there a medicine that can cure this disease? If you lack any medicine I will find it for you. I want to see Thai medicine progress."

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The King and Education: part 1

We'll begin with the opening six paragraphs. As you will see it is a brief "then and now" segment. (1) What was the situation immediately after World War II? (2) How has it changed for the better?

ascended to the throne – became King

recover – to get stronger after a period of weakness

in disarray – disorganised and confused

interrupted – caused to stop

fled – escaped

seek refuge – to find a safe place to live

devastated – damaged very badly; destroyed

massive – very large in size, quantity or extent

renovations – repairs or improvements (We saw this word yesterday, remember?)

minimal – very small in quantity, value or degree

plummeted – decreased by a large amount

hubs – centres

abysmal – very bad or very poor in quality

literacy rate – the percentage of the population that is able to read and write, excluding young children

When His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej ascended to the throne in June 1946, Thailand had barely recovered from the effects of World War II which had ended just one year earlier.

“Our educational system had been in disarray like never before,” former education minister ML Pin Malakul writes in his report, “His Majesty the King and Education”.

“Schooling was interrupted as people fled the war to seek refuge somewhere else. A large number of school buildings were devastated by the bombs of the occupying army. Gone with them was a huge amount of educational equipment and teaching materials. Worse yet, teachers were forced to find other jobs in order to survive.”

“After the war,” he writes, “massive renovations were urgently needed. Yet, budgets were minimal. Many older, mostly wooden school buildings were destroyed by major flooding that occurred during the war years.”

As a result of the war, academic standards plummeted and most students failed to complete school due to poor attendance. “Some classes graduated to the following grade level without the required knowledge.”

Sixty years later, Thailand is now recognised as one of the leading academic hubs in Asia. From an abysmal 50 per cent literacy rate in the mid-1940s, now over 95 per cent of Thailand’s 63 million citizens can read and write.

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The King and Education: part 2

The main theme of this part is clear from this sentence: "The major achievements of the past six decades could not have been realized were it not for major contributions by His Majesty the King." You'll want to read to find out why.



- (1) Find out which groups of learners the King has paid particular attention to.
- (2) Find out why learners in remote areas are able to learn along with students in Hua Hin.
- (3) Why was the early part of the King's **reign** so challenging and how did he respond, i.e., what were some of the things he did?
- (6) What is the purpose of the Navaruek Foundation?

reign – the period of time a particular king or queen rules a country

besieged – was attacked regularly

insurgents – people who are fighting against the government or army of their own country

isolated – a long way away from large towns and difficult to reach; remote

commit – to say or promise to definitely do something

initiative – an important act or statement that is intended to solve a problem

motivated – caused to do something

bond – a strong feeling of friendship, love or shared beliefs and experiences that unites people

The major achievements of the past six decades could not have been realized were it not for major contributions by His Majesty the King. The poor, the handicapped, those of minority ethnic groups, the young and the old – the King has made certain that each be provided with access to education, as long as they have the will to learn.

Over half a century His Majesty's vision has helped to build the solid foundation necessary for the continued economic and social development of the nation.

In his reign, His Majesty has built large numbers of schools throughout the country, especially in remote areas. He has granted scholarships to students with excellent academic records, as well as those who are poor, orphaned, and < handicapped. He called for the publication of the Thai Junior Encyclopaedia which promotes self-directed learning.

In areas with teacher shortages, hundreds of thousands of students in remote schools learn their lessons together with pupils in the King's private school, Wang Klaikangwol, under the Distance Learning via Satellite programme. The King also

established the Phra Dabos project to promote vocational education for those without the necessary preparation to enter the traditional educational system.

One of the most challenging times came early in His Majesty's reign. Thailand was besieged by communist insurgents. Border regions and the more remote areas were plagued with insurgent attacks. For most children of school age living in these isolated communities, schooling was but a distant dream. There were no schools to attend and no teachers to staff them.

His Majesty's frequent visits to these areas beginning in the early 1960s made a huge difference in the lives of many youngsters.

"The number of primary schools increased noticeably, especially the remote Border Patrol Police schools. At a time when even education inspectors found it tough to visit these far-flung schools, none other than Their Majesties the King and Queen and HRH the Princess Mother were frequent visitors. Their visits served to promote education in isolated parts of the country and their contributions of educational equipment, clothes and food encouraged parents to commit to keeping their children in school," recounts ML Pin.

Between 1963 and 1974, His Majesty built nine schools for children in remote hilltribe villages. Thirty-one more were built under royal initiatives for the children of officials and employees of the Forestry Department. The Navaruek Foundation, established by His Majesty the King, supports needy primary and secondary school students. Using personal funds, His Majesty initiated construction of temple schools, run by monks to cater for poor children and orphans. The initiative was motivated by the belief that the bond between disadvantaged children and religion could be strengthened within the school setting.

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The King and Education: part 3

In this section, we find out about how the King played an important role in helping communities deal with two terrible natural disasters many years apart. (1) What were these two disasters and (2) what did the King do to help, particularly in making sure the children of the area continued to receive an education? (3) What famous foundation was established by His Majesty as a result of the first disaster?



marginalized – cause to feel unimportant and apart from other people

perished – died as the result of a disaster or accident

destitute – having no money or possessions

orphaned – having lost both parents

catastrophe – an unexpected event that causes great suffering or damage

disparity – a noticeable difference

auspicious – something that indicates success is likely

morale – confidence and cheerfulness

inception - beginning

rural – areas away from cities and town, especially agricultural or forest areas

urban – city areas

His Majesty did not overlook children belonging to marginalized groups. Special schools were established to serve the children of parents infected with leprosy.

Other schools were established to serve physically handicapped and developmentally delayed children.

In 1962, Cyclone Harriet hit 12 southern provinces. One small seaside village in Nakhon Si Thammarat, Laem Talumpuk, was particularly hard-hit. Over a thousand people perished in the storm. Houses, farms, temples, and schools were swept away. Those who survived were left destitute. Many children were orphaned.

His Majesty, using Au Sau radio, invited the public to donate money to help the victims. Through his “Making Merit with the King” campaign, the radio station raised more than 11 million baht. Part of the fund went to assist deprived orphans whose parents died in the catastrophe. The rest was set aside and used to establish the Rajaprajanugroh Foundation in 1963.

The foundation established primary schools in the cyclone-affected areas offering

orphaned students both room and board. As more donations flowed in, the foundation eventually extended its mission to help poor and disadvantaged children in other areas of the country.

For instance, Rajaprajanugroh School 33, in Lop Buri province, accommodates orphans of Aids victims, while the Rajaprajanugroh School in Pang Mapha, Pai, and Mae La Noi districts of Mae Hong Son province serve hilltribe children. Others offer education, room, and board for children of Aids-afflicted parents.

When the tsunami hit six southern provinces in December 2004, children again suffered. Many lost their parents, friends and teachers, and saw their entire communities vanish within a matter of minutes. The Rajaprajanugroh Foundation was among the very first organisations to provide help. Last year, the foundation built four new schools in Phangnga, Phuket, Krabi and Ranong covering 1,200 needy children in all.

Like many remote schools across the country, the Rajaprajanugroh schools suffered from a severe shortage of teachers. In far-flung rural schools, the ratio of teachers to students stands at 20 teachers per 1,000 students compared with 70-100 teachers per 1,000 students in district schools. The shortage of teachers, especially those qualified in sciences, mathematics and languages has resulted in a widening of the academic gap between urban and rural students.