



DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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MEDICAL AID TO VIET-NAM

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr E.G. Whitlam, announced today that the Australian medical aid programme in Viet-Nam is to change its emphasis from "patient care" aid to the fields of public health and medical training.

Mr Whitlam said that the revised programme follows a major review of Australian medical aid to Viet-Nam. As part of this review a team of three doctors led by Sir William Refshauge, the Director-General of Health, visited Viet-Nam in November 1971. The team included a senior Adelaide surgeon and former leader of two surgical teams in Viet-Nam, Mr Mervyn Smith, and Dr J. Boxall, of the Department of Health. The new programme is based on the review team's recommendations.

Mr Whitlam said that as part of the change, arrangements have now been made for the Australian Surgical Team at Bien Hoa to be withdrawn at the end of December. Since 1964 "patient care" aid has formed a major part of the Australian medical aid programme in Viet-Nam comprising for the most part surgical teams attached to selected provincial hospitals. In 1968, at the peak of the programme, 46 Australian doctors, nurses and support staff treated approximately 59,000 patients and performed over 10,000 operations in four provincial hospitals. During the patient care programme nearly 500 doctors, nurses and support staff recruited from all Australian states served in Viet-Nam.

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Mr Whitlam said he wished to draw attention to the valuable assistance provided by state medical authorities, the Repatriation Department and major city hospitals in forming surgical teams.

The phasing out of the final surgical team at Bien Hoa will coincide with the completion of a major re-building project at the Bien Hoa hospital carried out under the medical aid programme at a cost of \$1,450,000. The new medical assistance programme has already taken shape and Australia is constructing a prophylactic and diagnostic clinic in Saigon at an estimated cost of \$250,000. This community health clinic will provide normal out-patient facilities, dispensary, a small laboratory, X-ray facilities, minor operating room and a maternity wing. The building is expected to be completed by April.

In addition to the public health clinic project, medical training programmes for Vietnamese civil medical teachers and public health staff are being planned. These courses will be held in Australia and Viet-Nam. Already, at the request of the Vietnamese authorities, a senior Australian surgeon is undertaking a training programme for medical teaching staff at the Cho Ray teaching hospital in Saigon. Further training assistance within Viet-Nam is planned for doctors in the fields of X-ray diagnosis, E.N.T. surgery and public health administration.