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A Brief Visit to Chiang Mai: Oral Public Health in Action in Northern Thailand

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### A Brief Visit to Chiang Mai: Oral Public Health in Action in Northern Thailand

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#### Introduction
- Thailand has made significant strides towards improving oral public health.
- Outreach programs focusing on oral health are especially vital for underserved populations.

#### Background

**UNIVERSAL COVERAGE**
- Annual funding per capita: 10 Baht for dental care (~30 cents)

**ACCESSIBILITY**
- Total Population: 67 million
- 43 million (~65%) in rural areas
- 3-tiered system:
  - Sub-district - Small local clinics. Clinics serving > 10,000 people have one dedicated dental nurse (2 year degree, simple procedures)
  - District - Small hospitals with on staff dentists (who make sub-district clinic visits once a month)
  - Province - Large hospitals with surgeons and dental specialists
- Medical charts are organized by family to efficiently track community members

#### Methods
- Shadowed a public health dentist for 3 weeks in rural Northern Thailand
- Interacted with 20 patients receiving oral care at the Chai Sathan Sub-district Community Clinic
- Participants were all in the senior outreach free denture / implant program.
- Average Age of Participants: 74

#### Results
- All patients were missing critical upper or lower molars, usually both.
- 10% needed molar implants, 25% needed full upper and lower denture, 65% needed upper or lower partial dentures

#### Discussion
- Dental health challenges & solutions
  - EDUCATION: Community classes on basic oral hygiene
  - NUTRITION: Research shows a statistical association between the number of natural teeth and below average weight in Thai older people.
  - LOW QUALITY PROSTHETICS: Oral health problems have been aggravated by ill fitting, low quality prosthetics made outside of a lab by salesmen lacking proper training in dental prosthetics.
  - PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS: Some seniors have difficulty grasping the small handle of a toothbrush. Pictured: A simple solution

#### Conclusion
- Despite limited resources, healthcare has become accessible in rural areas due to efficient use of manpower
- Thailand can serve as an example to other communities facing similar healthcare challenges.