

CANCER RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Vietnam National Cancer Institute - A History of its Development

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The National Cancer Institute in Hanoi, Vietnam - the oldest Cancer Institute in Indochina - has a long history of development. This interfaces with the contemporary history of country and has been much influenced by the latter.

1. From the Foundation to 1945

At the beginning of the century, in the preparation for an extensive and long-term colonial exploitation, beside the investment on construction of infrastructure, French colonists opened a range of schools and training institutions including a medical school (founded 1902) to train local intellectuals for their future purposes. A range of indigenous protectorate hospitals were also established. The Institute of Radium of Indochina, a private organization and the only one in Indochina at the time, was founded on the 19th, October, 1923.

In this period the institute had a different name: Institute du Radium de l'Indochine, Institute de Curie de l'Indochine, Fondation de Curie. The first director of Institute was Dr Pierre Moullin. In the initial period the institute in fact had a total of 4 directors, all of them French.

Initially, the institute had the functions of a research institute with the four following goals:

1. Build up in Hanoi and other provinces of Indochina Radiotherapy units (Institut de Radium Therapie et Roentgentherapie)
2. Research and monitor cancer problems
3. Organize cancer control units
4. Treat cancer patients



Photograph 1. Vietnam National Cancer Institute

The Institute du Radium de l'Indochine had a surface area of 5720 m² located within three main streets in the center of Hanoi. The main building was constructed between 1915-1920 and remains as one typical representative of French architecture left in Hanoi today (Photograph 1).

Initially, the Institute had only one radiodiagnostic unit, 3 radiotherapeutic units of 250 KV and 400 KV and 60 KV and radium. The Institute did not have facilities for hospitalization so it provided only av radiotherapeutic outpatient service. Patients came from surrounding hospitals and private clinics The pathology department was also established at this time.

The number of patients increased from year to year. In 1927 there were 231 cases treated but in 1929 this number had became 361. Most of the patients were Vietnamese. In this period, the institute additionally served as a training base of medical school.

In 1945 due to important historic events for Vietnam, the institute temporarily was closed.

2. During the II French war (1945-1954)

In 1946, French colonists invaded Vietnam for the second time. The country under the direction of Ho Chi Minh and the Government began the second anti-French war. Hanoi was under French occupation in this period. The war in fact did not very much touch the Institute: the infrastructure and equipment had been well maintained and at the beginning of 1947 the Institute was restored to its full activities. It was still a private institution, directed by a French doctor, but the number of Vietnamese doctors working in the institute had significantly been increased.

In 1954, French colonists were forced to leave Vietnam and the country was temporarily divided into two parts: the North and the South. The Institute, however, became the property of the Vietnamese government and people.

3. From 1954-1969

In 1959 the Institute became the Oncology Department of Phu Doan Hospital (nowadays- Viet Duc [Vietnam-German Friendship] Hospital) with a specialized clinic for

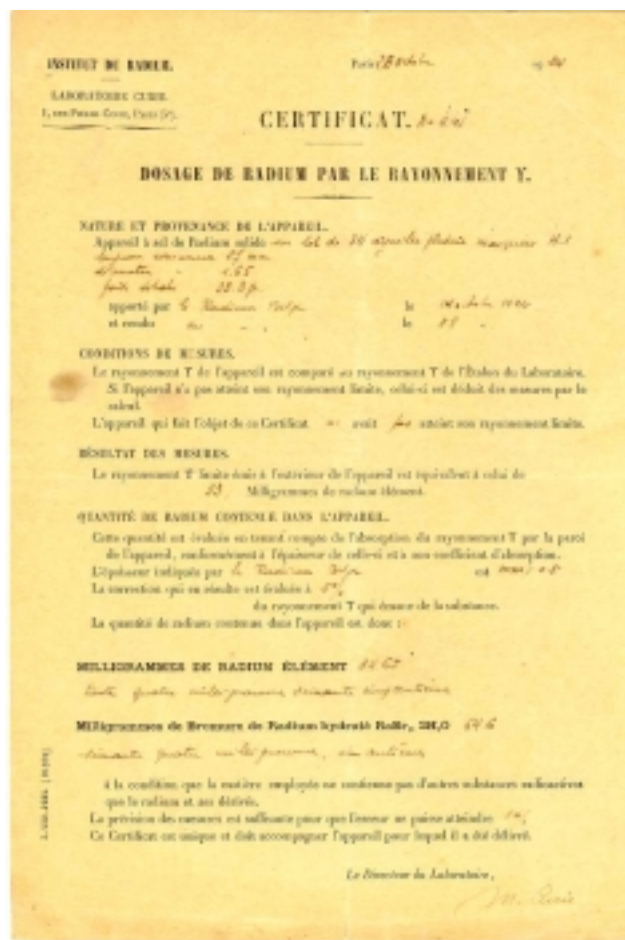


Figure 1. A Historic Document

consultation of cancer patients sent from others hospitals; two surgical services and one radiotherapeutic service.

In 1958, the first Cobalt therapy unit had been installed in Vietnam with the aid of the Soviet Union. With the demand and need for cancer diagnosis and treatment continuously increasing, the Department became more and more independent with the following services: Pathology, Cytology, Biochemistry, Hematology, X-ray therapy, Cobalt therapy, an Operation Unit and eventually an Experimental Oncology Unit.

In 1965, the US Army carried out extended war against the North of Vietnam. Hanoi and other cities of the North were bombarded and the Institute had to be evacuated to a rural area 25 km away from the city, where all activities nevertheless could be continued: surgery, chemotherapy, and Radium therapy. In 1968, when the extended war ended, the Institute came back to Hanoi.

4. From 1969-1975

To meet the urgent demand in cancer research and control in Vietnam, after the end of the extended war of the Americans, in 1969, the Ministry of Health decided to found the K Hospital (National Cancer Institute) with 120 beds and 68 staff based on the former Oncology Department of

Viet Duc Hospital. The Hospital is located in the area of former Institute of Radium and was directed by Dr. Pham Thuy Lien. The duties of institute were:

- * To organize the admission, diagnosis and treatment of cancer patients
- * To investigate and propose the strategy for cancer control, treatment and training of oncologists in Vietnam

There were three sections: clinical (medical affairs office, clinical service of radium therapy, operation room, service of radiotherapy), para-clinical (pathology, hematology, biochemistry, microbiology, X ray unit, pharmacology unit) and logistical (personnel, administrative, financial offices and pharmacology unit). It was a difficult period because: there was a shortage in human and finance resources; poor technical and equipment assistance due to the war; the number of beds was too small to meet the demand.

In 1971, US Army again bombarded Hanoi and other cities and the Institute was once more evacuated away. Besides providing services to cancer patients, the hospital had also to give a general surgery service and organize mobile operation teams to meet the needs of the war: save the lives of people injured by bombardment. Many doctors, nurses of hospital also left the hospital to serve in the liberation war in the South.

5. From 1975 to 1986

In 1975, the war ended in Vietnam and the country was reunified. While the country had to deal with a lot of difficulties and problems after the war, nevertheless, the Institute continued to be developed: with an improved infrastructure, a newly constructed building, and modernized equipment. The section of surgery expanded very quickly, and many kinds of oncological operations performed before in other institutes were now introduced. Since 1980, following scientific collaborative agreements between Vietnam and other country governments, many doctors of



Photograph 2. Modern Treatment Facilities

Institute have been sent to France, the Soviet Union, Hungary and other countries for training purposes.

At the end of 1986, hospital had 11 medical departments and 6 offices; 168 staff of which 60 had bachelor or higher degrees. Many post graduate training courses of different level of oncologists had been organized along with regular scientific seminars and workshops.

6. The Development of the Institute during the Renovation (from 1986 to date)

Organizational development: The Institute has been growing very fast during this period. At the beginning of period (1988), there were only 174 staff working in 15 departments and offices. At the beginning of 2000, the number of staff had reached 500 persons (of which 148 were MDs, 7 Ph.Ds., 20 MScs, 6 pharmacologists, 21 engineers) working in 31 medical departments and logistic offices. Since 2000 the Institute opened a second affiliated unit located 10 km from the center of city with more than 100 beds and housing the department of palliative care and pediatric oncology and one general surgery department. The total number of beds of the Institute thereby became 440.

Nowadays, the Institute has the following medical departments:

- * Head and Neck Cancer Surgery
- * Breast and Gynecological Cancer Surgery
- * General Surgery I
- * General Surgery II
- * Thoracic Cancer Surgery
- * Anesthesia and Reanimathology
- * Chemotherapy
- * Head and Neck cancer Radiotherapy
- * Breast and Gynecological Cancer Radiotherapy
- * General Cancer radiotherapy
- * Consultation
- * Pathology and Cytology
- * Hematology
- * Endoscopy
- * Biochemistry
- * Imaging diagnosis
- * Pharmacology
- * Infection control
- * Palliative care
- * Pediatric oncology
- * Para-clinical Dep. of II Affiliated Unit



Photograph 3. Staff Discussion Around a Microscope

Offices:

- * Planning and statistics
- * Outreach activities and Hanoi population based cancer registry
- * Administrative
- * Accounting
- * Personnel
- * Material and Medical Supply
- * Nursing
- * Administrative office and General service of II affiliation

Others:

- * Center for physiotherapy and medical physics

Technical Development:

New modern medical techniques have been introduced: Linear accelerator, Brachytherapy in radiotherapy, CT scanner for diagnostics. The Institute now routinely performs surgery for almost all kinds of neoplasms other than brain - CNS and urology cancers.

The activities of Institute are not only limited to treatment but have been extended very much to primary prevention and health education, mass screening and research and the Institute is the major collaborating center for cancer control of the Ministry of Health

The Institute is a member of UICC, the International Association of Cancer Registries, and APOCP.