



Associate Parliamentary Limb Loss Group

for the promotion within Parliament and Whitehall of the PREVENTION OF LIMB LOSS and the provision of prosthetic, orthotic, wheelchairs & special seating and other vital rehabilitation services/technologies for ALL PERSONS WITH LIMB LOSS in the UK and Internationally.

THIS ELEPHANT NEVER FORGETS

How He Got a Leg Up

Baby Elephant "Chhouk" was found two years ago, wandering alone in the forests, having lost his foot in a snare, and his stump was badly infected. He was thin and sick, with little chance of survival. Now he is a happy little fellow.

PROSTHETICS students from 10 different nations have travelled to Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Centre in Cambodia to see Chhouk, a 4-year-old baby elephant who lost part of a leg, be fitted with a new prosthesis.

Their trip was organised by the Cambodian School of Prosthetics and Orthotics (CSPO), Cathy McConnell, who headed the project, said it was only the second case she knew of an elephant receiving a prosthetic limb.



"We weren't sure if it would work with the limited resources we have here," McConnell said. "But the staff were keen to take on the challenge."

At first, a temporary foot using the same materials as human prosthetics with a base made from car tyre was designed for testing, McConnell said. This was fitted to replace the 12 centimetres of Chhouk's missing foot on March 28 with excellent results.

It was assumed Chhouk would need sedating during the X-ray and casting, McConnell said, but a supply of turnips and bananas was enough to keep him happy.

Thou Sambath, a key member of the design team from CSPO, said this original prosthesis needed three repairs in the two months since fitting, so the new design was made more rigid to withstand the wear and tear that comes with being an elephant's prosthesis.

But on Friday as the team tried out the new design, the added rigidity made it difficult to fit. Once on, it still appeared to be too tight and uncomfortable for Chhouk, who eventually threw a minor elephant tantrum until it was removed.

Thou Sambath said it was the first time he had worked with a patient that could not give him feedback regarding comfort and fit.



"What he wants, he cannot tell us," he said.

Finding the perfect design will come down to trial and error, so new measurements were taken and the design will be adjusted as needed to find the right balance between durability and comfort, Thou Sambath said.

Rann Vannara, who is about to complete a bachelor's degree in prosthetics at Latrobe University in Melbourne, Australia, said he learned the importance of adaptability to his job from the day's excursion.

---ENDS---