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## Cambodian doctor on trial for infecting patients with HIV

**PHNOM PENH:** An unlicensed Cambodian doctor who allegedly infected more than 200 people with HIV, including some who later died, went on trial for murder yesterday.

The case has shone a spotlight on the chronically underfunded health care system in an impoverished nation where many have to rely on self-taught or unlicensed medics to receive treatment.

Yem Chroem, 55, is accused of infecting locals in the remote village of Roka in western Battambang province by reusing dirty needles.

Em Sovann, his lawyer, said the court has set a five-day trial.

"In the courtroom my client still claims he is innocent," Em Sovann told AFP, adding that the doctor did not deliberately or knowingly infect his patients.

Yem Chroem faces charges of murder, deliberately infecting patients with HIV and running an unlicensed clinic.

He faces life in prison if convicted, Em Sovann said.

For millions of Cambodians — especially the poor and those in remote regions — unlicensed doctors are the only realistic healthcare option for everyday ailments.

World Bank figures say Cambodia, one of Asia's poorest nations, has just 0.2 doctors for every 100,000 people, on a par with Afghanistan.

Similarly impoverished Myanmar has 0.4 per 100,000, while France boasts 3.2 per 100,000.

Much of Cambodia's shortfall is made up by unlicensed practitioners. — AFP