

Cambodia bans 'virgin surgery' adverts

January 29 2015

The Cambodian government has ordered a hospital to stop advertising so-called virginity restoration procedures, saying it harms the "morality" of society.

A number of Cambodian clinics quietly offer hymenoplasty—a procedure commonly sought after in countries where a woman's virginity is prized—but Phnom Penh's Victoria International Hospital is unusual in publicly advertising their services.

In a letter dated January 23 and seen by AFP on Thursday, Information Minister Khieu Kanharith told the hospital to "halt the advertisement offering virgin [surgery](#)".

"Your hospital has been advertising services about the technology of virgin surgery and altering women's vaginas on radio, TV, and in newspapers with excessive commentary which affects the long-lasting morality and beautiful traditions of Cambodian society," Kanharith said.

He added that the adverts also harmed "the dignity of other patients" who come to the hospital for unrelated treatment—without directly condemning the surgery in itself.

In a separate letter, Kanharith ordered all media outlets in the country to immediately pull the adverts.

The [hospital](#) did not respond to requests for comment.

Cambodian women are under intense pressure to retain their virginity until marriage, as in many societies in Asia.

Some seek procedures to restore their hymen, despite the fact that the presence of an intact hymen—which can easily be broken without engaging in sexual activity—is not regarded as an effective way to test virginity.

Opposition lawmaker and former minister of women's affairs Mu Sochua said hymen restoration procedures should be banned—and urged officials to check whether hospitals had doctors qualified to carry out such procedures.

"Virginity restoration surgery can seriously harm the reproductive health of women if it is not done professionally," she told AFP.

In recent years Cambodia has also become notorious as a regional hub for selling young women's virginity to wealthy men, according to activists.

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