

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## The Crumbling State of Health in North Korea: Direct testimony from recently departed North Korean exiles

*“If you don’t have money, you die.”*

A 20-year-old woman from Cheongjin, North Hamgyeong province (left North Korea in November 2008):

*People in North Korea don’t bother going to the hospital if they don’t have money because everyone knows that you have to pay for service and treatment. If you don’t have money, you die.*

A 26-year-old man from Musan, North Hamgyeong province (left North Korea in December 2006):

*North Koreans normally do not go to the hospital unless they need surgery or they’re really sick. Hospitals don’t carry any medicine – even if you want an injection, you have to first buy the medicine at the market and bring it back to the hospital for the doctor to administer the drug.*

A 56-year-old woman from Musan, North Hamgyeong province, underwent an appendectomy in 2001 without anaesthesia because the hospital had none available: *The operation took about an hour and ten minutes. I was screaming so much from the pain, I thought I was going to die. They had tied my hands and legs to prevent me from moving. I was hospitalised for one week and then I recovered for about a month at home.”*

A 24-year-old man from Hwaseong, North Hamgyeong province, had his left ankle crushed by a moving train. Without any anaesthesia, his doctor amputated part of his left leg from the calf down:

*Five medical assistants held my arms and legs down to keep me from moving. I was in so much pain that I screamed and eventually fainted from the pain. I woke up one week later in a hospital bed.*

A 19-year-old man from Pyongyang often went to a small clinic near his house for penicillin injections:

*[The doctor] just took a used syringe and gave me the penicillin injection. He didn’t bother sterilizing it before he used it on me or afterwards when he used it on another patient... For us, this level of hygiene care was normal.*

A 27-year-old man from Cheongjin, North Hamgyeong province said that:

*Since 1992 or 1993, I have not seen any ambulances circulating in my city. I’ve only seen them in television programmes. ... Only the very rich have a phone in their house, so normal people like us cannot call for an ambulance. I think even if you called, nothing would happen because the vehicle wouldn’t have any petrol.*