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# China: A Glimpse by Howard Physicians

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## A Glimpse by Howard Physicians



When a factory worker lost his right hand at the wrist, Chinese surgeons successfully implanted it; six months later, the patient regained full use of the hand.

When other factory accidents severed the fingers of two workers, they too, regained use of their fingers after implantation by Chinese surgeons.

These are some examples of spectacular advances in surgery achieved by Chinese physicians in the last decade, a medical team from Howard University College of Medicine reported after a visit to the People's Republic of China.

When two patients—one with ruptured meniscus in the right knee and the other with a case of bleeding duodenal ulcer—sought surgical treatment, Chinese physicians applied acupuncture as anesthesia to deaden nerves around the portion of the body to be cut. And the operations were conducted as the patients watched and talked with the physicians.

This, too, represents another example of the uses of acupuncture (a 2000-year-old Chinese treatment that primarily involves the insertion of tiny needles directly upon nerves to produce anesthesia or relieve pain) and other traditional Chinese medicine, along with Western medicine, the Howard team reported.

Members of the team—Dr. Marion Mann, Dean of the College of Medicine; Dr. W. Montague Cobb, Distinguished Professor of Anatomy, who retired recently after 45 years of service to the University; and Richard P. Green, who received his medical degree in May—said modern China is a land of mysteries and friendly people with a revolutionary life-style.

China is, they reported, a country where medical care is provided practically free to every family; a place where physicians are called medical workers and being a doctor carries no special privilege or prestige. It also is a place free of American tourists; where adequately-clad and healthy-looking youngsters march to schools proudly behind the ever-present Red banner; where workers in blue uni-

forms pedal bicycles to factories and communes; where huge portraits of Chairman Mao Tse-tung decorate building walls; where large posters carrying quotations from Mao's teachings are displayed along the litter-free streets of urban and rural localities; and where the presence of Black physicians from America generated excitement and pleasant smiles from curious Chinese men, women and children.

"I don't know whether it was because we were foreigners or because of our skin color, but the Chinese were curious about us. Everywhere we went, we attracted large crowds," Dr. Mann said. "They were friendly and courteous."

One experience with a crowd occurred as Dr. Mann and his colleagues shopped for souvenirs in a department store. "Our presence created a sensation. The people gathered around us . . . and they did not speak English. So, I reached into my pocket and pulled out a name tag in Chinese that I had kept from a banquet the previous evening, and held it up to them. They began to pronounce my name," he said.

As a friendly gesture, he said, "I again reached into my pocket and took out several business cards and distributed them to the crowd. This created more excitement, although my name was written in English."

Of the Chinese with whom the three Howardites came in contact, no signs of hostility were ever evident. "They were friendly toward us . . . well aware of our struggle here," explained Dr. Cobb. He described them as "humble" but "sophisticated" people, whose officials invited questions as well as criticism from the visitors. "Don't forget," Dr. Cobb noted, "Oriental inscrutability often hides more than it reveals."

The Howard University team spent 15 days in China in the recent school year as part of a 10-member delegation representing the National Medical Association, NMA.

The primary purpose of the visit, the



12 first by a medical delegation from the United States since the relaxation of travel restrictions to that country, was to observe the Chinese system of health care delivery to a population in excess of 700 million, and to learn of advances in medical techniques achieved by the Chinese since the Communist Party came to power under the leadership of Mao.

The Howard University team reported that the Chinese have reached a superior level in certain aspects of medical technology. For example, the Chinese have almost perfected the techniques involving the implanting of severed limbs, the doctors reported.

The application of acupuncture as treatment for some diseases, and as anesthesia during surgery, is another aspect of China's advanced medical techniques which impressed the Howard team.

Also, the team praised the Chinese system of using para-medical personnel effectively in the delivery of adequate health care to all segments of the population; the control of a number of maladies, such as venereal disease, drug addiction and alcoholism. Major crimes and prostitution are virtually non-existent, the doctors said.

"The Chinese political structure does seem to have succeeded in providing medical care to all segments of the population even in remote areas and they (the Chinese) are making some outstanding contributions to medical knowledge," Dr. Mann reported.

He noted that hospitals and clinics which serve the day-to-day health care needs of the people are, in most instances, comparable to those in the United States. "Most of the patient wards of the hospitals we visited were as good as the ones at Freedmen's Hospital . . . some of them less crowded than ours," he said.

### Adequate Health Care for All

The delivery of health care in China is the responsibility of the Ministry of Health, a state agency that is entrusted with the

development of a viable health care delivery system for all of China's population.

To accomplish this objective, the Chinese reorganized and restructured their medical training programs. Under the new system, thousands of qualified doctors are trained in three years instead of six; there is emphasis on preparing thousands more "barefoot doctors" (para-medical health personnel) to care for the health care needs of the people. All of them are trained under a system that encompasses Western medical concepts and traditional Chinese medicine.

The Chinese medical curriculum is intensive and rigorous. A student's day begins at 6 o'clock in the morning and ends at 10 o'clock in the evening, six days a week.

Dr. Green remarked that it would be "rather rough" were he to study under the Chinese system.

He said graduates of Chinese medical institutions do not receive degrees or the "doctor" title. Instead, they are called "medical workers." Under the Chinese system, "being a doctor carries no more prestige than being a factory worker," Dr. Green explained.

In China, people in the community determine who should get medical training. And the young men and women chosen to pursue medical careers must first serve successfully as lower level health workers, Dr. Green reported. Specialists in the various branches of medicine are trained as needed, he said.

For a first-hand look at the Chinese medical training facilities, the Howard University team and the other members of the NMA delegation twice visited the Chungshan Medical College in Kwangchow (Canton).

"In general, the physical facilities seemed adequate, except for audiovisual aids," Dr. Mann reported. "The anatomy teaching dissections and the pathology museums were more extensive and of greater teaching value than almost any American medical school can boast."

"The teachers we met," he explained,

"seemed as professional and as competent as those in any other medical school. Some were fluent in English and eagerly discussed their own fields or the school's role in building socialism. The chief of surgery who showed us two patients whose severed fingers had been implanted, appeared to be in his early thirties and very alert."

Dr. Mann said the Chinese system of training doctors is unlike that of the Howard University College of Medicine, or any other Western medical school.

"Judged by Western standards," he explained, "the Chinese system is hardly capable of producing the scientist-physician, soundly based in cell biology, biochemistry and physiology, etc., as Western schools espouse. The curriculum squeezes all basic science instruction into four morning hours. Our experience in American medical education indicates that 900-odd clock hours in the first year are insufficient to impart to our students the knowledge we consider requisite for an adequate understanding of clinical medicine."

He said, however, the objective of the Chinese is "to produce as many health workers as rapidly as possible. The sacrifice of some basic theory or of some concepts which might be 'nice to know' for the attainment of their primary goal is, in their view, an acceptable trade-off. Moreover, the bonuses accruing to the students in heightened class consciousness and determination to build socialism will, they expect, make learning and teaching medical subjects several times more efficient in a given amount of time than could ever be possible in a 'bourgeois' society."

Coupled with the "brief exposure to Chinese medical training," which Dr. Mann said "helped us to assess the quality of their programs," the visitors toured hospitals and clinics, to observe and evaluate the delivery of health care at different levels. They were permitted to visit a mental institution in Peking (a rare opportunity for foreigners) which cared



for 100 patients, equally divided between sexes.

Dr. Mann said the Chinese physicians at the hospital pointed out that about 80 percent of the patients were being treated for schizophrenia and paranoia; about 15 percent for depression.

Dr. Mann said he and his colleagues were surprised to learn that Mao's teachings constituted part of the therapeutic process of mental patients, in addition to drugs and psychiatric therapy.

Another interesting aspect of Chinese medical technology observed by the Howard team was the use of acupuncture as treatment for deaf mutes and persons suffering from gastric ulcers.

The successful implanting of severed limbs of factory accident victims and patients suffering from malignant conditions in their limbs was praised by Dr. Mann and his colleagues, who, while in China, saw photographs of severed fingers that Chinese surgeons had successfully rejoined to the hand.

Although surgeons in other countries, including the United States, have from time to time repaired severed limbs such as legs and arms with some degree of success, Dr. Mann credited the Chinese as the first to successfully implant severed fingers.

Dr. Mann and his colleagues returned from China inspired and enlightened by the achievements of the Chinese in the field of medical technology. As a result of the visit, he said, contacts have been established with the Chinese and, hopefully, the Chinese experience may enhance the continuing effort in this country to meet the health care needs of Black Americans and other minorities.

Dr. Cobb summarized the trip: "The NMA delegation returned to the United States greatly inspired by what it had witnessed of the colossal achievements of the People's Republic of China in a scant 23 years under their political system — and with a deep sense of challenge to produce under our system matching accomplishments in the parallel areas of

medical education, training and recruitment of workers in all the health related areas, community medicine, family planning and the provision of adequate health care for all of the American people."

### By Air, Train and Bus

What Dr. Mann, Dr. Cobb, Dr. Green and the other members of the NMA delegation observed during their visit was fascinating and enjoyable. Among the places visited were major population centers such as Peking, Changsha, Kwangchow and Shanghai. Visits to communes and the Great Wall of China and the cave of Peking Man were part of the itinerary.

Like most visitors to China, the team arrived in that country by train from Hong Kong, transferring to a Chinese government operated train at a border check point for the journey to Kwangchow (Canton); then by air to Shanghai, Peking and Changsha. Short trips to communes and the countryside were by bus.

Dr. Mann described the service on the trains and planes as fairly adequate and the rides comfortable. The trains, he noted, reminded him of those that operated in the United States some two decades ago, except in one instance when the team traveled in a reasonably new and carpeted pullman car.

The planes, he said, were medium in size—propeller or twin engine jets. The flights were pleasant. And during one long flight, the passengers were served fresh fruits rather than a full meal. And hot towels to freshen up, he reported.

Dr. Mann said China has an abundance of bicycles, and owning one, or a wristwatch, is an indication of being well-off. Those without bicycles use public transportation, usually buses and street cars —except in Peking where there is a subway system, Dr. Mann reported.

The industriousness of the Chinese people and their dedication in nation building impressed the Howard team. "They give you the impression that they have a job to do. And most of them seem to know what that job is," Dr. Mann said.

"All aspects of Chinese life and work, and all workers, require political orientation in accordance with the teachings of Mao and the Communist Party in order to assure that everyone's activity will be of benefit to the people, and attitudes and work must be constantly re-examined to maintain correct orientation."

He said he was fascinated at the "total capturing of the population's thoughts by the teachings of Mao. I wondered whether this is good or bad. The people (Chinese) seem to be happy."

The Chinese cities are large and populated to capacity, with most downtown business districts boasting modern office buildings. The older residential sections, where most of the Chinese live, are overcrowded but clean and appear structurally sound, he said.

Peking, like other cities of China, has several opera houses, cinemas, museums and exhibition centers, he said. Revolutionary messages are conveyed by the performing arts. "Everything has the purpose of promoting socialism," Dr. Mann noted.

The Howard team and the other members of the NMA delegation stayed in comfortable hotels. Some rooms had private baths and telephones but no television. A set was usually available in a lounge on each floor, Dr. Mann said.

Although meals were Chinese style, Western food was available on request at most large hotels. "The Chinese food was deliciously prepared," Dr. Mann said. "You know, they serve soup after the main course," he mused.

He said the average daily expense per team member—for hotel, meals and transportation within China—was between \$16 and \$20. A similar trip to Europe could cost up to \$50 a day, he noted.