

► How to take city's advanced healthcare to China's interior

Internal medicine

Dr. John P. Howe at Shanghai Children's Medical Center.

Photo: Cai Xianmin

By Hou Shuqi

When Dr. John P. Howe walked onto the grounds of the Dujiangyan Medical Center in Sichuan Province, the sight nearly took his breath away. The Chairman and CEO of Project HOPE, a nonprofit organization dedicated to bringing quality healthcare to people around the world, had stood on the same spot two years ago, where he saw entire city blocks that had been leveled by the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake.

But on October 18, Howe arrived in Dujiangyan to find a new 650-bed hospital – built largely with donations from Shanghai residents – where men, women and children were receiving world-class medical care.

According to Howe, the quality of the care is at least partially the result of a program, facilitated by Project HOPE, which sent doctors from Dujiangyan to Shanghai for additional medical training. The skills they acquired are saving lives, Howe said.

One of those doctors told him that the training in Shanghai taught him how to put patients on ventilators. Ventilation is a common treatment for severe pneumonia, which, as it turns out, is one of the most common ailments affecting children in Dujiangyan, Howe said in an interview with the Global Times a day after his visit.

Project HOPE was founded in 1958 in the US. Its work focuses on medical training, health education, and conducting humanitarian assistance programs in more than 35 countries and regions. It started operating in China in 1983 and was one of the first international nonprofit health organizations to operate in the country.

Howe's experience in Dujiangyan, a city just outside the provincial capital of Chengdu, gives a glimpse at one of the toughest challenges facing the Chinese healthcare system today – how to bring the quality healthcare of the large cities to the country's smaller cities and rural areas. It is a problem that

Project HOPE is tackling with in China, and one that Shanghai's medical community is actively involved with as well.

What do you think about the gap between the Chinese and international healthcare systems? How can China narrow this gap?

Thinking about healthcare in China, I think of the children's heart program here at Shanghai Children's Medical Center (SCMC), which is world-class. Just this week there are 200 world leading heart surgeons gathering here in Shanghai, hosted by the SCMC.

The challenges for the greater country are similar to the US and other large countries. That is: how do you make heart healthcare in the urban areas accessible to the rural areas? You have the very best healthcare in China; you have a significant priority to let this good care be enjoyed by the people in the western rural areas.

How many times have you visited Shanghai? How do you think the city's healthcare system is developing?

Over the past 10 years, I have visited Shanghai around six to eight times. Each time I've come to Shanghai, the SCMC is different.

Ten years ago its outstanding heart surgery program for infants and children was growing, but it wasn't yet number one in the world. Last year, the doctors of SCMC performed over 3,000 open heart surgeries for infants



Dr. John P. Howe visits child heart patients at Shanghai Children's Medical Center on October 16.

Photos: Courtesy of SCMC



and children, putting it close to the number one hospital in the world for heart surgeries for infants and children. That led to the creation and dedication of the heart (ward) tower here at the hospital. Just about month from now there will be a dedication for another building, a building for children with cancer.

This was once a cabbage patch in Pudong in the late 1980s. It's now a world-recognized pediatric hospital ... I well remember my visit with (former) President Jiang Zemin in Beijing. He spoke with a great pride about the hospital. With encouragement from the famous heart surgeon Dr. Ding (Wenxiang), Jiang Zemin was a great champion of the hospital.

How does Project HOPE work with SCMC?

This began with nurse education and nurse training, and evolved with the relationship with the leadership of Shanghai and creation of the hospital. Then we were on to the major diabetes program. It was 1998 that Jiang Zemin (decided) to help respond to the epidemic of diabetes throughout China.

Over the past 10 years, we have trained over 200,000 doctors, nurses and healthcare workers in 31 prov-

inces. Indeed we felt so honored to have been invited to participate in the development of the country's healthcare. That's the past. Looking into the future, we are excited about being partnered with the new cancer (ward) tower.

The (Project HOPE's) leadership will be here in November for the groundbreaking and new facility. Beyond that we had a discussion today with the leadership of the hospital and medical school on which ways we can expand our collaboration.

Why collaborate with SCMC?

It matches with (Project HOPE's) priority. They help with children. We helped to create the first children's hospital in Poland in the 1980s; then, in the 1990s, with the invitation of Jiang Zemin, we helped to build the SCMC. And this week, we will have an opening ceremony for our third children's hospital in the Middle East, the hospital of children's cancer in Iraq....

Today (SCMC) is important because the hospital is one of the world's biggest success stories. We are eager to help the hospital go on to a new era of accomplishment by adding a research component and by adding more emphasis on rural areas focusing on traditional diseases like heart disease, cancer and beyond that to some of the neglected diseases.

What challenges Project HOPE has faced in China as an international NGO?

Challenges are also the opportunities ... The principal challenge is the immensity of the need, particularly in the rural areas. Therein lies the opportunity with our nutrition, heart, cancer (and) rural fellows programs to be able to reach out and join with our Chinese colleagues in making a difference to the people in the rural areas.

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