

HOLIDAYPEOPLE

The honorary citizen of Yan'an

A professor of orthopedic surgery recalls his time spent in Yan'an leading a team of experts tasked with building up the city's medical facilities, **Wu Yong** reports in Shenyang.

Nearly four and half years after he left Yan'an, Zhu Yue still occasionally dreams about the cave houses at Yangjialing and Baota Mountain.

As a senior professor of orthopedic surgery at the China Medical University in Shenyang, Liaoning's provincial capital, the 51-year-old also heads up one of China's leading orthopedic departments at the First Hospital of the CMU, which performs over 4,500 operations a year.

He spent 18 months working toward alleviating poverty by offering treatment to patients in Yan'an, a remote northwestern city in Shaanxi province.

"Returning to Yan'an was to explore the historical starting point of the CMU. Our original remit (when the university was founded) was to work for the health of the troops, but now it is to work for the health of the residents," Zhu says.

Founded in 1931, the CMU arrived in Yan'an at the end of the Long March with the Central Red Army (or First Front Red Army) in 1935, where it developed over the following decade. It stood to serve the army but also provided free medical services to the local residents, according to Guo Xiuzhi, executive deputy chief of the publicity department at the CMU.

However, the city known for being the cradle of the Chinese revolution had witnessed a low standard of medical services over the years due to a lack of proper training facilities at local hospitals and a lack of support from high-level medical colleges.

In order to help Yan'an with its healthcare issues, the CMU began offering support to Yan'an People's Hospital in 2012. Zhu was assigned with the task of leading the first team of medical experts to the city to provide professional support.

"It was a brief stay but it offered valuable experience. Working in Yan'an didn't only help improve the levels of local medical care, but also helped me to educate and improve myself," Zhu says.

In order to work more effectively, Zhu sent several packages of surgical instruments from Shenyang to Yan'an. This proved to be a farsighted move as he was presented with a very rare case just four months aft-



Zhu Yue (center), a professor of orthopedic surgery at the China Medical University, carries out a spinal operation with a team of doctors from Yan'an People's Hospital in Yan'an, Shaanxi province, in November 2013. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Zhu (right) and his colleagues at the CMU provide free medical consultation to veterans of the Red Army and Eighth Route Army in Bayi Nursing Home in Yan'an in August 2014.



Experts from the China Medical University provide free medical consultations at the health center in Linzhen town, Baota district, in Yan'an in March 2014.

er reaching the city.

Hao Yangang, a farmer in Yanchuan county, couldn't stand up straight because his spine was bent. Due to limited treatment skills and a tight family budget, Hao had gone from being the

breadwinner of the family to a burden, forcing them to the brink of financial collapse.

Zhu and his colleagues put together a detailed plan for a series of operations, which he performed himself. It was a great success and

Hao was able to stand up straight again, and the family was saved from ruin. Hao's wife was so grateful that she presented Zhu with a set of handmade traditional northern Shaanxi paper-cuts.

"This set of paper-cuts is recogni-

tion and praise from Yan'an people for my work. I will treasure it as my most precious gift. The patient's trust and gratitude also strengthened my belief in the value of coming to Yan'an to help the poor," Zhu told China Daily.

Moreover, Zhu helped to train local medical experts and set up a department for pain management and rehabilitation at Yan'an People's Hospital, making a fundamental improvement to the standard of local medical services. The hospital's orthopedics department also intended to apply for a key national department under his guidance.

"The expert team from the CMU led by Zhu has played a major role in alleviating the local people's difficulties in receiving proper treatment, by training local medical teams and helping the hospital in Yan'an to build up a spirit of academic cooperation," said Liang Hongxian, the former mayor of Yan'an city.

Zhu Yue was conferred the title of honorary citizen of Yan'an in March 2017 for his outstanding contributions to alleviating health poverty in the city.

Two years after Zhu's departure, Yan'an People's Hospital was successfully upgraded to a third-grade class-A hospital in 2017. On May 7, 2019, the Shaanxi provincial government announced Yan'an's overall success in eliminating poverty.

Hao Jiandong, director of the Yan'an Health Commission, said: "The CMU has supported Yan'an wholeheartedly, and with a true affection for the local people. They are repaying the old revolutionary base and it's a practice of the 'red doctor spirit'."

Even today, Zhu still provides guidance to his friends in Yan'an and continues to help improve the orthopaedics department there. Local doctor friends also mail him millet and red dates as festive gifts.

"As senior academics, doctors have a responsibility to demonstrate personal values. I returned to Yan'an to support the local medical services. My team and I have received patriotic and professional education. Returning to the starting point of the Chinese revolution and the CMU has helped me to stay true to my original aspirations. The invaluable wealth of this experience will stay with me for my entire life," Zhu says.

Cai Shuang contributed to this story.

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From Red Army doctors to poverty alleviation angels in white

By **WU YONG** in Shenyang and **HUO YAN** in Yan'an

Bai Dongqin, a pediatrician at the Yan'an People's Hospital, didn't expect she would ever have the chance to return to school to study for a doctorate degree after four years of working.

As one of the first batch of four lucky candidates, she is currently studying severe pediatric diseases at the China Medical University, specializing in the pathogenesis and intervention of acute and chronic lung injuries.

"I am really lucky to have the opportunity to study at the CMU, one of the most famous medical institutions in China with a long history. I plan to set up a department for critical pediatric diseases after my studies," said Bai.

As the cradle of the Chinese revolution, the city of Yan'an has been seriously plagued by a lack of medical services for decades. In recent years, thousands of people have been trapped in poverty because of poor health conditions.

Data from the Yan'an Health Commission show that 5,358 people fell into poverty due to illness by the end of October last year, accounting for 53.4 per cent of the total number of medical cases. This represents a 10.8 per cent increase over the same period in the previous year.

Experts blame a lack of high-quality medical services for the situation. For example, if the budget is 10,000 yuan (\$1,438) to treat an orthopedic patient in Yan'an, the cost would climb to 30,000 yuan in Xi'an and 100,000 yuan in Beijing, due to deductions made from medical insurance coverage reimbursements and the higher cost of accommodation and transport.

"Yan'an had been declared officially rid of overall poverty in May. However, the situation in which people slipped back into poverty due to illness has not reduced, but, on the contrary, kept on growing. This has brought great challenges to eradicating poverty and the success of the government's overall campaign to alleviate poverty and to achieve a moderately prosperous society by the end of 2020," says Hao Jiandong, director of the Yan'an Health Commission.

The situation was also echoed by Bai. At present, severely ill children can only go to Xi'an for treatment, some 300 kilometers away from Yan'an. While it costs a lot of time and money, the patients' families also bear a huge emotional burden.

In order to improve the capability of local medical services, the CMU and Yan'an People's Hospital set up a partial trusteeship to coordinate operations between the hospitals in the region in 2012.

Zhu Yue, a senior professor of orthopedic surgery at the CMU, says that since Yan'an is the cradle of Chinese revolution and the original intention behind the hospital was to ensure the health of the Red Army, their fight should now be to improve the health of the local people. He is also the vice-president of the First Hospital of the CMU who led the first poverty alleviation medical team's visit to Yan'an in 2013.

Founded in 1931, the CMU was initially the Military Medical School of the Chinese Red Army. It was the first college founded by the Communist Party of China and played an important role during the Long March (1934-35), the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45) and the War of Liberation (1946-49). The school was estab-



A map shows the route of relocation of the China Medical University: its founding in Jiangxi's Ruijin in 1932, establishing the first medical school in Yan'an in 1934, and moving to Shenyang, capital of Liaoning province, in 1948. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

lished in Yan'an after the Long March with the Central Red Army (the First Front Red Army) in 1935, and grew to become China Medical University in Yan'an. The CMU was set up not only to serve the military, but also to provide free medical services to the local residents at the time.

Yan'an local, 83-year-old Liu Fengming from Liuwanjiagou, Baota district, still remembers having his ear infection cured by doctors from the CMU as a child almost 80 years ago.

While it is relatively easy to treat one person's illness, it is rather more challenging to improve the overall medical services of a city.

Lin Guangdong, president of Yan'an People's Hospital, recalls the vicious cycle in which the hospital was trapped due to a lack of good doctors before 2012. In order to achieve practical results and promote fundamental change, the CMU devoted its efforts to improving three key aspects: scientific research, personnel training and discipline.

Over the last seven years, the CMU has organized hundreds of academic conferences and conducted in-service training programs for local doctors.

The expert group guided local doctors to publish more than 50 academic papers and won 18 provincial

and municipal awards for scientific and technological improvements.

All these efforts have greatly improved the overall ability of the hospital's talent pool and laid solid foundations for its sustainable development. With the help of the CMU, the Yan'an People's Hospital has established two key provincial specialties in the fields of pediatrics and orthopedics, according to Lin.

The last seven years saw a quick rise of the number of outpatients, inpatients and surgery procedures at Yan'an People's Hospital.

In 2017, the hospital was successfully upgraded to a third-grade class-A hospital and is now competent in many types of complex surgical procedures.

"Nearly 80 per cent of patients can now receive surgical treatment in Yan'an. This not only helps to save money and time, but also plays a vital role in the work of poverty alleviation," Hao says.

Moreover, the CMU's health poverty alleviation model provides a new pathway for medical reform in Yan'an. Partnering with the CMU and two other medical universities, Yan'an has established more medical groups and started to provide high-quality medical services at the grassroots level.

In order to consolidate the achievements made in eradicating health poverty, the CMU and Yan'an government signed a new agreement to formulate a strategic development plan in order to ensure the success of their health poverty alleviation efforts.

Guo Xiuzhi contributed to this story.

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Q&A

Hao Jiandong, director of Yan'an Health Commission, Yan'an, Shaanxi province

What is the situation of poverty caused by diseases in the city of Yan'an?

"The number of people who fall or slip back into poverty because of illnesses was 5,358 by the end of October, accounting for 53.4 per cent of the total. This is a 10.8 per cent increase over the same period last year. A lack of high-quality medical services has been the main challenge in our efforts to alleviate poverty."

How do you carry out poverty alleviation through health treatment in Yan'an?

"Yan'an has set up a health poverty alleviation office which includes the health commission, the finance bureau and other departments. We have sought support from the China Medical University and set up mobile hospitals in rural areas to ensure the health of the elderly and children. Anyone suffering from one of 11 major diseases could receive free treatment."

What are the CMU's key achievements in health poverty alleviation in Yan'an?

"The CMU is helping to improve not only the medical services at Yan'an People's Hospital, but also the city's entire medical system. Nearly 80 per cent of poor people can now receive treatment in Yan'an. This saves cost and also plays a huge role in alleviating poverty here. The joint operations conducted between the CMU and Yan'an People's Hospital are providing valuable experience for follow-up medical reforms. The school's senior officials attach great importance to their work in Yan'an. Their help is both heartfelt and practical."