Canadian doctors volunteering again in China

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Twelve Canadian medical experts are visiting 27 hospitals in China to volunteer in the spirit of Dr Nathan Bethune, considered a hero to Chinese.  
Doctors from Canadian and American universities and medical institutes have joined the 16th Contemporary Bethune in Action (May 6 to July 1) in China.  
It is part of the mission of Bethune Medical Development Association of Canada (BMDAC), a non-profit organization established by a group of Canadian medical professionals.  
"During the war that Japan invaded China, Dr Norman Bethune sought to improve the welfare of all citizens without regard to political boundaries. It is in this spirit that our association was formed," said Dr Lee Errett, president of BMDAC, a professor of cardiac surgery at the University of Toronto, the former chief cardiac surgeon at St. Michael's Hospital.  
In China, Bethune (1890-1939) performed emergency battlefield surgeries and started training for doctors and nurses.  
According to Errett, the organization started with cardiac surgeons going to China and trying to increase the capacity and knowledge base of Chinese surgeons. Now it is involved with many medical specialty areas, including cardiology, oncology, general surgery, ophthalmology, gynaecology and obstetrics.  
Over the past eight years, professionals in BMDAC's Action program have visited 80 hospitals in China, providing surgeons and training. The next 16th Action will first go to local hospitals in Qinghai province, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and Jiangxi province.  
"There is much to be learned from both countries. The establishment of closer relationships will create learning and teaching opportunities in both countries," said David Dai, one of the founders and secretary-general of BMDAC.  
Dr Dominique Shum-Tim, a Chirurgie cardiothoracique and professor of surgery at McGill University, was one of the first doctors to join BMDAC's volunteer team.  
He started his own project nine years ago when he first went to China. After he was invited by Dai, he has visited more than 40 Chinese cities and performed over 100 surgeries in China.  
"This is just a part of the global surgery that we're trying to do, especially in China. We all work in collaboration with each other," said Shum-Tim, adding that the most recent project is to raise $2 million for endowment funds for McGill and bring Chinese doctors for training every year,  
"We try to expand our knowledge to China's colleagues, and hopefully when they go back to China, they will be able to help patients on their own and help training the next generation of surgeons," he said.  
Dr Paul Chiasson, director of the surgical training program at St. Mary's General Hospital, who has been a part of the team for two years and led a thoracic surgery team during the medical exchange trip to China last October, said the exchange was enlightening and educational.  
"It's been a great cultural exchange  … I've learned so much, and I look forward to the future and sharing more on further trips," Chiasson said.  
Several Chinese doctors from local Chinese hospitals who were invited by BMDAC for residencies in Toronto hospitals, said they learned much from their Canadian counterpart, especially the spirit of Norman Bethune.  
"It is perhaps more important now than any other time in history that nations work to improve communications and solidify our relationships," added Errett.

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