Travel

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being the primary means of advertisement.

We began our medical and dental clinic the very next morning. A typical clinic day would begin with a team gathering at 6:30 a.m. at our hotel for devotions and singing, followed by walking through the town square to breakfast at a nearby restaurant, then walking the remaining few blocks to the hospital building to start seeing our first patients at about 8:30 a.m. Our triage team would arrive a bit earlier to begin to bring order to the 80-100 people who would inevitably be chaotically milling about the clinic intake area, some having arrived well before dawn, and many having traveled for hours to reach us.

China is a nation full of enigmas, and one of them is their health care system. As a communist country since 1949, one might assume that there is universal access to healthcare for its 1.3 billion citizens. As I have come to find in my travels there, that is not the case. Patients are generally required to pay the full amount out-of-pocket prior to receiving service. There is no widely established national health plan, and only very recently has there been any kind of partial financial assistance available to help cover health care costs. Coupled with the spotty availability of competent health care providers and hospitals, particularly in rural and frontier areas, this reality has kept many people from obtaining even the most basic health and preventive care. It is precisely this gap in health care that our medical team was hoping to help bridge during our time there.

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After our prospective clinic patients would arrive on premises, they would be triaged with the taking of a brief health history, recording of vital signs, then routed to their appropriate dental or medical provider. As providers, we would each be ensconced in our own rooms, with at least one or two interpreters to provide the critical informational support that allowed us to successfully care for each patient. Also, we would often have young Chinese doctors-in-training present as observers, giving us opportunities to teach and encourage them as we worked. Patients ranged in age from infants to octogenarians, and most adults described themselves as "herdsmen." Of course, we also saw merchants, laborers, students, housewives, and a smattering of unemployed. Common maladies we encountered included hypertension, heart disease, stomach pains, back pain, joint pain, respiratory infections and headache. Occasionally, we were confronted with more unusual conditions, such as brucellosis, and presumptive tuberculosis. No matter what the condition, our goal was to provide compassionate and clinically excellent care to every person we encountered.

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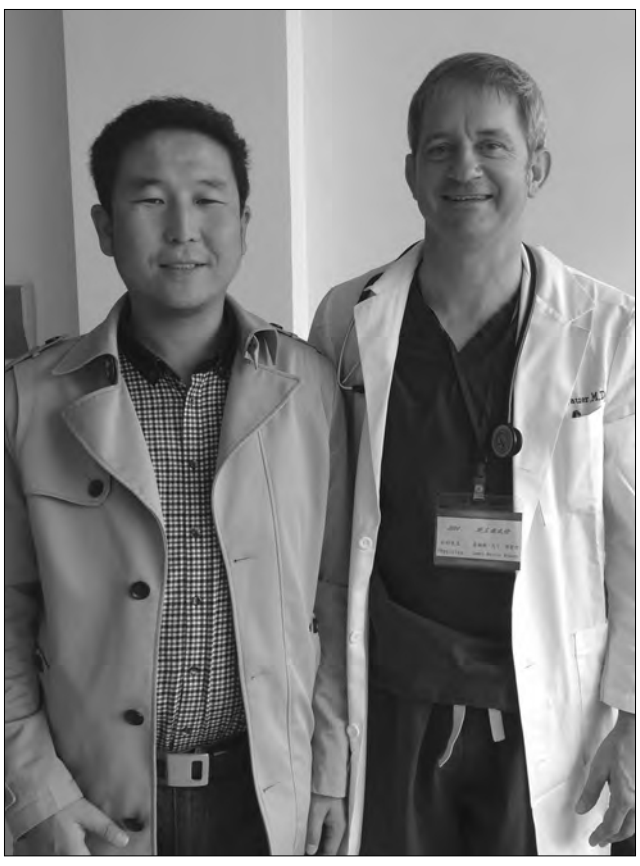
Our clinic days would usually last from 8:30 until 5 p.m. or so, with a lunch break in the middle. On average, each of us providers would see about 20 patients a day, and by the end of our time there, we had given free care collectively to about 900 people. I still have snapshots in my head of several of these: The young female student with migraines, the elderly man tenderly cared for by his children after a devastating stroke, the local "bone-setter" curious about our western medicine, the large-animal vet struggling with chronic brucellosis … and so many others.

At the end of our last clinic day, as our team sat together in a "closing ceremony" presided by the matron of the hospital and the head of the local Red Cross, it was wonderful to see that our presence there had touched our hosts deeply and the warmth of their gratitude was a fitting reward. It was with an odd mixture of sadness and joy that we said our good-byes, encouraged by the reality that our time there had been a blessing to our hosts and to the many who had received our care.

As we traveled back toward our respective homes and jobs over the next several days, we relished our last few hours together with the teammates from China and America, with whom we had shared such a rich time of camaraderie and service. Jan and I were reminded yet again of the satisfaction and joy that comes from joining together to reach across the divides of language, politics, and culture, willingly using our collective skills and gifts to serve those less fortunate than ourselves, and then embracing the blessings of new friendships, good will, and a job well done.



Photos by Jan and James Brauer

DR. JAMES BRAUER with a Chinese colleague. At left, and below, some of the women and children who came to the clinic. "The locals loved taking selfies with us! The women's issues in this area range from the usual OB/GYN concerns to domestic violence. It was a privilege to care for these women whose daily lives are a lot more challenging than I can imagine," Jan Brauer writes. The photo of the elder at left "demonstrates to me the way people have lived for hundreds of years … boots, quilted clothing, head covered and juxtapositioned with a cell phone. Note how new the hospital building is. The Chinese administrator thinks of this hospital as an outpost serving a minority group."

"MANY PEOPLE came to our clinic. Many times the whole family came. They began lining up at 4 a.m. for the 8:30 a.m. start. These women were waiting their turn for clinic and chatting on the bench," Jan Brauer writes. "In my mind it shows how alike all cultures are: Grandmas chatting … These Grandmas came with these kids. Notice how bundled these kids are and that the baby is on a 'baby board'." The girl is holding headbands we brought from Hood River. She was thrilled to receive a gift from the United States. An interesting note, in this town, there is no high school. The high school kids board at a school about 3 hours away."

Providence Foundation tour preview scheduled for Feb. 26

Collete Vacations will present a slideshow and information on two upcoming tours coordinated by Hood River native and Providence Auxiliary Volunteer past president Kay Lincoln.

The free tour overview will be at 11 a.m. on Feb. 35 at The Charburger Restaurant, 4100 Westcliff Dr., Hood River

A portion of the proceeds from the tour will support the Providence Hood River Memorial Hospital Foundation scholarship fund.

Tour options for 2015 include a visit to Greece and its islands, June 7-21 and an Alaskan land and cruise adventure, Aug. 8-12.

Funds raised through travel booked go to scholarships awarded by the Providence Volunteer Auxiliary group and all award are used by local health care workers and students.

"Kay Lincoln's efforts to organize these vacation adventures have helped several students in our area," said Brandi Sheppard, director of volunteers. It's a win-win where travelers can enjoy the trip of a lifetime while benefitting health care professionals in our community."

For details call Lincoln at 541-490-3177.

HRVAC elects new officers

The newly elected Board of the Hood River Valley Adult Center held their organizational meeting and elected the following officers:

Suzanne VanOrman, President; Kristi Thomsen, Vice-President; Debra Laraway, Secretary; Paul Zastrow, Treasurer.

There are currently vacancies on the Board. Applications and job descriptions can be picked up at the front desk at the Center for anyone interested in serving. Applicants will be called for interviews. A rolling file will be maintained and applicants will be called to see if they are still interested.

HRVAC is a community facility, located on Sterling Place on the Heights, that hosts a variety of meetings and classes, and is home to the Hood River senior nutrition program, which provides on-site meals for the community. It is also the base kitchen for the Meals on Wheels program, which delivers hot meals weekdays to clients who are unable to make it to the center.

Birth

Elijah Teems

A son, Elijah Andrew Teems, was born Jan. 20, 2015 at Providence Hood River Memorial Hospital to Cameron Lynn and Michael David Teems, Jr., of Parkdale. He weighed 8 pounds and measured 21 inches.

He joins three brothers: Alexander Louis Teems, 7, Michael David Teems IV, 1, and Matthew Charles Teems, 1.

Grandparents are Michael Teems, Sr. and Sonya Teems of Maupin, Ore., and Pamela Huber of Palm Bay, Fla.

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