



Experiencing the NHS system A three month visit by Chinese clinical observers

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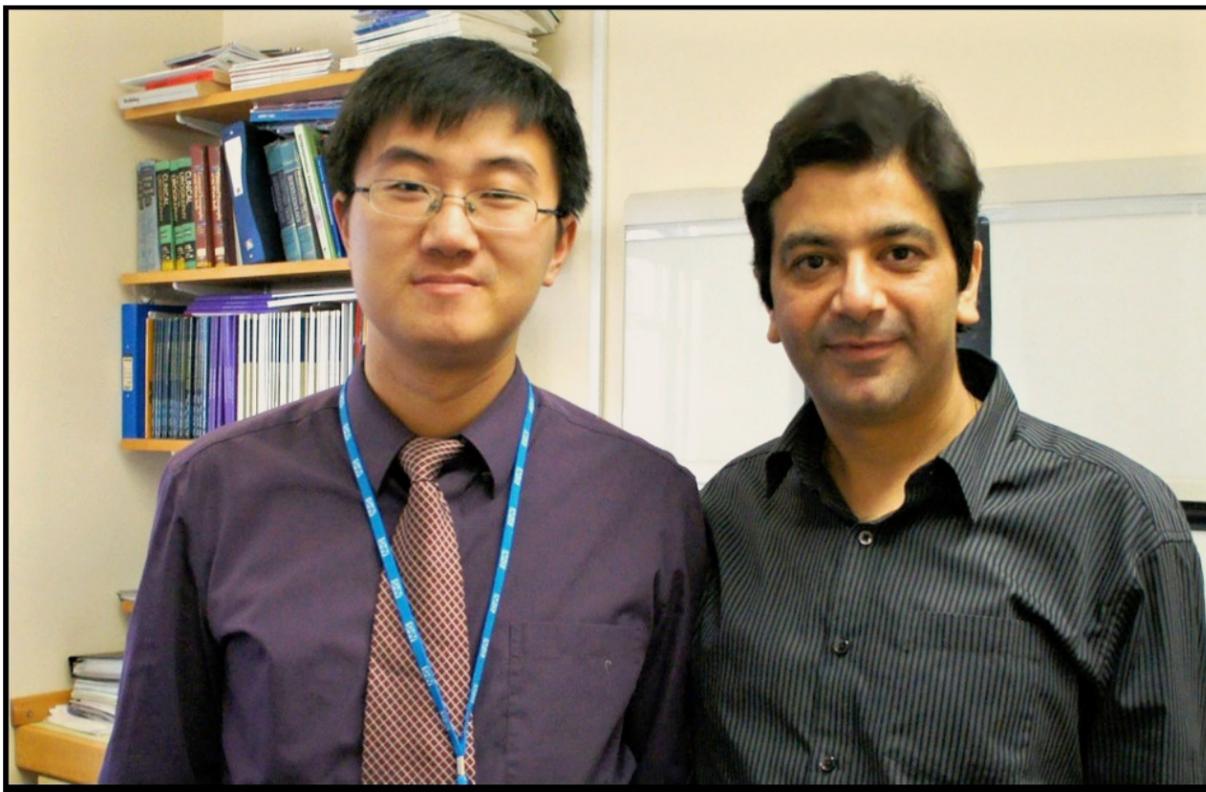
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INTRODUCTION

China is now at a critical stage in its health care reforms. Learning successful experiences from other countries is important to us. Among various health care systems, the NHS in the United Kingdom has shown its global reputation for serving the public with free health care of high quality and equality. To gain vivid knowledge from the NHS system, 25 senior doctors from China were sent as clinical observers to different hospitals for 3 months under joint support from the Chinese Government and the UK Severn Deanery. We represent various disciplines, including urology, general surgery, neuro-surgery, orthopedics, endocrinology, gastroenterology and anesthesiology.

EXPERIENCE IN BRISTOL

The authors were appointed to work in the Departments of Gastroenterology and Neuro-Surgery at Frenchay Hospital, North Bristol NHS Trust. Under the guidance and with the warmhearted help of consultants and registrars, we participated in outpatient clinics, inpatient



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wards round, surgery, endoscopy, ERCP, academic meeting and other activities. Although it is difficult to learn special techniques during such a short time, we are impressed by the working environment, NHS system and doctor-patient relationships

MEDICAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

We found the medical education and training system here is excellent. I was told that a registrar would have about eight years training in specialty with a fair salary from the UK government. More importantly, the majority of consultants have a strong teaching awareness and are good at teaching. There are also a lot of training courses for special techniques. Besides, the patients here are very cooperative. They do not refuse medical activity carried out by registrars instead of consultants, which guarantees that the registrar would be a competent specialist after training. Furthermore, the training system is quite flexible for individuals, as you can apply for a period of leave for

research or fellow work in another country. Impressively, the name “theatre” is full of imagination and the operation here is truly an art. The employee supportive system is another important experience we can learn. It is quite normal and frequent that doctors or nurses have professional and personal problems during busy clinical work, especially when some employees are young and sensitive. Sometimes it is difficult to solve these problems alone and hence it is important to let them know where and how they can get help.

WORKING ENVIRONMENT AND DOCTOR-PATIENT RELATIONSHIP

The working environment and doctor-patient relationship is really harmonious in the UK. The outpatient clinics are not crowded and every patient generally gets sufficient time to discuss their concerns with doctors.

The doctors are all very friendly to patients. The consultation

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usually starts by the doctor introducing themselves and addressing the patient with the title “Sir” or “Madam” and they generally end the consultation with the sentence “any questions”?

The patients are really thankful and trust in doctors and the doctors do their best to help patients, not only in treating disease and alleviating sufferings, but also in creating every possible convenience for patients. The patient privacy is always put in the first line. Every time when I was present for clinical activities, the consultant asked patients for their permission, which showed respect for patients’ privacy.

GENERAL PRACTICE

We believe that the General Practice (GP) system is very successful in acting as the “gate keeper” for the NHS system, where GPs provide basic medical service to local patients as well as decide and arrange the appointment of patients with special clinics. This system is really helpful in reducing medical expense and keeping equality. In China, patients always go to the hospitals without appointment and they believe that the larger hospital, the higher the medical service

quality. Hospitals in China are generally overcrowded, which causes patient’s dissatisfaction towards doctors and a tense bilateral relationship. For instance, the hospital I work in is the biggest one in Zhejiang province and has over 3000 beds. However, the beds are always in shortage and when I am in GI outpatient clinics I have to see over one hundred patients a day. I am sure you can imagine how stressed I become and how hurried the patients feel! Therefore, after witnessing the harmony and equality in the NHS system and the doctor-patient relationship, we would say that Chinese Government could learn to set up a GP system and send medical managers to the NHS for better understanding.

TWO SIDES OF THE COIN?

As every coin has two sides, we would like to mention that there are a few aspects that could further improve the NHS. The most important one we feel is that the efficiency in non-emergency cases should be enhanced. The GP system has greatly reduced the medical expense as “Gate keeper” but it takes a considerable time to transfer patients to the specialists and get special investigations. Under the current system, for instance, patients may

need months to get a GI endoscopy. Similar delays can be seen in other specialties, which may delay disease diagnosis.

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