



# DR. JOHN TZE:

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## Bridging the gap between medical care in China and Canada



Dr. John Tze

**Only eight years ago, in 1985, Dr. John Tze Wah Jun, who had studied medicine and practised in North America for over 30 years, made his first visit back to China. Since then, Dr. Tze has made 34 trips to China—all with the goal of helping to improve medical care for the children of China and Canada. Training programs, neonatal screening centres and hospital pairings are only a few of the programs initiated by Dr. Tze. For most people just conceptualizing this goal would be daunting to say the least.**

**T**his enormous undertaking had a rather inauspicious beginning. Invited by the then Mayor of Vancouver, Michael Harcourt, to accompany him on a trip to Vancouver's sister city of Guangzhou in southern China, Dr. Tze spent more than a day visiting various children's health care facilities. What he saw concerned him but amazed him. Yes, there were inadequate physical facilities and outdated equipment but in just one outpatient facility, the staff were seeing 2,000 - 5,000 children a day. The dedication and commitment of the hospital staff made a deep impression on Dr. Tze.

Having been a teacher of child health care for more than 20 years, Dr. Tze responded to the staff's eagerness to learn and proposed establishing a 'sister' relationship between Guangzhou Children's Hospital and British Columbia's Children's Hospital in Vancouver. Typically understated, Dr. Tze says, "I had the advantage of being Chinese and speaking Cantonese, and having the support and help of fellow health professionals in Vancouver." In 1986 the relationship between the two hospitals was formalized and enthusiastically accepted by both.

The lack of a common language was one of the first obstacles, but was overcome with the establishment of an English program in the Guangzhou Hospital by a Vancouver teacher who volunteered three months of her time. She, too, caught the spirit of enthusiasm for the project and stayed for more than a year.

**I**n November of that same year, a delegation of more than 30 from British Columbia's Children's Hospital — board members, doctors, administrators — travelled to Guangzhou to determine the needs of their sister hospital and to establish concrete measures to meet these needs. Within the next year, Dr. Tze travelled to Guangzhou four times and was amazed at the dramatic changes in health care delivery and attitude that were taking place. "I began to see on the faces of the staff hope and optimism for the future. Also, the local government had started to pay attention to the hospital and to this new cooperative venture and were giving increased support," says

Dr. Tze. He continues, "I realized that if, with the help of Canadian colleagues and Chinese counterparts, I could make a difference at this level, I could expand the idea to a national level."

That's when Dr. Tze realized the need for the establishment of an internationally representative Foundation which would serve as a catalyst for change and improvement in health care for children. For Dr. Tze believes that not only will the children of China benefit from the work of the Foundation but also the children of Canada. As he explains, China is a country of geographical magnitude even greater than Canada, with many, many times the population of Canada as well as vast areas of sparse population. And yet, in terms of public health, they have the best system in the world. For example, 90% of the children in China are vaccinated against communicable diseases.

**T**hrough joint research projects, Canadian medical researchers will be able to tap into a body of statistics far greater than their own. As well, by providing Chinese health care institutions with Canadian equipment and training, an ongoing demand is ensured for Canadian technology and training.

Dr. Tze not only dreams in large dimensions, he delivers on an equally grand scale.

To date, 12 Canadian hospitals and child health institutions have been paired with 13 similar institutions in China. More than 200 Chinese child health professionals and workers have travelled from China to Canada on exchange training programs and more than 300 Canadian doctors and nurses and other health workers have travelled to China.

An initial three of a planned-for 30 neonatal screening centres have been established to help improve the detection of and treatment of congenital disease. (One such disease is congenital hypothyroidism leading to retardation which if detected early enough can be cured simply with medication.)

A research centre has been established at the Capital Institute of Pediatrics in Beijing which will focus on the development of