

practice of traditional Chinese medicine — acupuncture, moxibustion (the cauterization by burning herbs on the skin) and herbal medicine — were merged with western medicine. By 1958 there were thirteen medical schools and several hundred secondary schools teaching various levels of medicine. In the 1960s new emphasis was put on rural health. Medical doctors in rural clinics began teaching the rudiments of patient care to young farmers. These “barefoot doctors” attend classes for three to six months; and after they have practiced for a time, they receive additional training.

They diagnose common diseases, prescribe



*Traditional medicine men, such as this one in Senegal, are often converted through training into health auxiliaries.*

traditional Chinese and western drugs, practice acupuncture and use some western techniques. Women practitioners become midwives, provide maternal and child care, advise on the use of contraceptives and perform abortions. There are now over a million barefoot doctors practicing in the countryside; and the health of a huge population, which has been chronically ill through much of history, has improved remarkably. Smallpox and cholera have been almost eradicated; and two parasitic diseases, lishmaniasis and schistosomiasis, which were once widespread, have been brought under control.

Norman Bethune, a maverick, was the pioneer Canadian teacher. He went to China in 1938 as a

volunteer physician and surgeon and wound up as the chief medical man with Mao Tse-tung's Eighth Route Army. In the face of impossible odds, he founded over twenty teaching hospitals, training hundreds of doctors and nurses.

He described the results: “The doctors who run this hospital range in age from nineteen to twenty-two and not one of them has received any training in a modern hospital; the nurses are young people between fourteen and nineteen. These are our greatest resources: They study diligently, strive to improve themselves and are willing to listen to

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“The new name for peace is development.”

*Pope Paul VI*

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criticism. Sometimes I'm unhappy with them from the point of view of medical knowledge, but when I see their purity, their sincere efforts to study, their love of their comrades and their selfless diligence, I can always find a way to suppress my dissatisfactions.”

Bethune died near Mao's front lines in 1939 from a septicaemic infection received while operating barehanded on a soldier. He was fifty years old.



*Dysentery is the great killer of infants. It can be controlled by health aides using easily learned techniques. Here one in Bangladesh does a swab.*