

From Pok Fu Lam to Hong Shu Lin

Out of the Box

Tony Chan Fan-cheong is president of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. He has spent his life pursuing his dreams relating to teaching and research, and has unique views on education, scientific and technological development, and nurturing the young.



I RECENTLY HAD an opportunity to visit the University of Hong Kong-Shenzhen Hospital for the first time.

Like many in Hong Kong, I had heard of the hospital when it started five years ago, but the news was mostly negative: that it was losing money; that bringing in Hong Kong style of hospital management and patient interaction would not work in the mainland; that it was difficult to recruit management and staff; that governance within the mainland system is challenging and so on.

So I was curious to see how the hospital was faring.

Travelling to the hospital in Hong Shu Lin, Shenzhen, could not be easier – it only took us less than an hour from Central.

The hospital is much bigger than I had expected, with a goal to host 2,000 beds and serve up to 8,000 patients per day by 2020 (Queen Mary Hospital in Hong Kong has 1,698 beds).

The need for healthcare in Shenzhen is huge. Its need for doctors is five times of the University of Hong Kong and Chinese University of Hong Kong medical school graduating class combined.

Shenzhen plans to establish five medical schools in a few years' time and 10 high-quality hospitals by 2020.

The main lobby of the complex looks like an airport terminal, with grand high ceilings. Separate buildings for out-patients, residents and administration.

Everything seems to be new, modern and spacious. There is both western and Chinese medical care. We visited the pharmacy and it was mostly automated, with robots doing the dispensing, QR code coordinated.

Lo Chung-mau, a well-known Hong Kong surgeon who began serving as the head of the hospital last year, was our host.

The maternity ward is in high demand and always full. We also visited some of the imaging equipment: CAT, MRI, as well as cancer radiation therapy.

All equipment is new and made in the United States and Germany. It gives a feeling much closer to a private hospital in Hong Kong.

The challenge to adapt the Hong Kong management style with mainland patient culture is immense. For example, the hospital has to prohibit the giving of red packets, and doctor appointments have to be made beforehand – which Shenzhen patients did not initially accept.

Shenzhen patients are accustomed to demanding intravenous drips for the most minor illnesses, and the hospital is seeking to eradicate this practice together with antibiotics abuse by promoting world-class clinical pharmacy services.

It is also progressing fast with automation and electronic payment; the average waiting time to pick up a prescription is 12 minutes, which is much faster than in Hong Kong. The goal is zero waiting time.

Lo presented an interesting slide comparing different attributes of hospitals in Hong Kong vs the mainland – eg capitalism vs socialism, centrally driven vs market driven, fixed funding vs self-sufficient, fixed salary vs merit/bonus, etc.

An uninformed reader can mistakenly identify the mainland attributes as those belonging to Hong Kong! I see that the hospital has already made much

progress towards its goal and vision of transplanting Hong Kong medical practice to improve that in Shenzhen, and by extension, the mainland.

But I also see many benefits for Hong Kong, which may not be obvious at first.

One is Shenzhen hospitals would become real alternatives for Hong Kong patients, especially the elderly who cross the border regularly and who can use the new health-care voucher.

Another goldmine for Hong Kong is the many more disease cases in Shenzhen compared to Hong Kong, which who should benefit the training of Hong Kong doctors, as well as in research for such diseases.

I have to admire what Lo and the hospital have been doing.

It is difficult enough to build a new hospital in any location, but it is even more difficult to build one where regulations and patient culture are so different.

The hospital's quest, if successful, will create a win-win for Hong Kong and Shenzhen.

Such effort will not be possible without dedicated and experienced people like Lo and the team of doctors and other staff he has managed to recruit from overseas, many of whom are Hongkongers attracted by the unique opportunity presented by the hospital, and who gave up stable and well-paying jobs to join.

The story reminds me of the founding of HKUST.

A grand vision is often more important than salaries in attracting certain kinds of talent.



Tony Chan and other VIPs tour the University of Hong Kong-Shenzhen Hospital Oncology Clinical Center.