**HEALING YOUNG HEARTS**

A doctor-artist alliance is saving the lives of hundreds of children with cardiac problems  
By Li Nan

On September 1, 20-year-old Tenzin Chonyi decided to celebrate her graduation by dancing with her friends in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, an autonomous region in southwest China. Her nimble steps showed no signs that she had gone through three major operations for a severe congenital heart disease.

The young Tibetan had been wheelchair-bound for the first 15 years of her life, unable to stand. It meant she could not go to school, and at home no one would play with her because of the shortness of breath that overcame her after the slightest exertion. So her biggest childhood dream was to put on a backpack, go to school and play with her classmates. That dream eventually came true in 2015, after a succession of operations, the last two by the same cardiac surgeon, Qu Zheng. “Doctor Qu gave me a new life,” Chonyi told Beijing Review. Chonyi’s story is part of a philanthropic initiative that has enabled hundreds of children with congenital heart diseases to receive free treatment over the past seven years.

Rolling Out the Green Carpet

The 57-year-old Qu is vice president of the Beijing-based Emergency General Hospital. His other identity started when he volunteered for mobile medical services in impoverished areas in Tibet in 2011. After the trip, 30 young patients from these areas were sent to the hospital to receive operations funded by the central government.

Chonyi, then 12, was one of them. When she arrived at the hospital on her mother’s back, her lips and fingernails were purple due to severe lack of oxygen. She was operated on immediately, and Qu was the surgeon. It took 48 hours after the surgery for her lips to turn pink.

Before Children’s Day in China on June 1, several artists, who were friends of Qu, volunteered to stage a show for the children. Yang Zhigang, a well-known actor who took part in the show, decided to sponsor one of the young patients. It gave Qu the idea of creating a platform that would connect all children from poor families with celebrity artists willing to help out.

Qu’s idea was appreciated by his artist friends, many of whom had grown close to him after they treated their family members. Yi Li, a film director, said doctors and artists can work together. “Doctors can treat physical diseases, while artists can heal emotional wounds,” he said. “If we work together, we can offer both physical and emotional treatment.”

In February 2012, they launched a website to post information about children in need of help. “Every penny will be used on treatment, and details about every donation posted online,” Qu said. The transparency attracted donors. Three months later, the Beijing Qu Zheng Charity Foundation was founded with Qu as its president.

To gain more funds, charity shows were organized in several cities, including Beijing and Houston in the United States. Dozens of celebrities took part in the shows and visited the young patients in hospitals. Television actor Xu Guangyu became involved in the foundation after Qu treated his father. “Qu has changed their lives,” he said, referring to the children who have received free operations funded by the foundation. “Some are studying in college today and some are married, which was thought impossible earlier. When we see their healthy and happy faces, we feel so satisfied.”

The foundation also offers online diagnosis service for hospitals in impoverished areas, using cloud technology. When encountering confusing electrocardiograms in small hospitals, doctors can upload the data onto the cloud. The foundation organizes experts in big hospitals to read the electrocardiograms online and send back their diagnosis. All the equipment is sponsored by the foundation’s partners. “It’s very convenient. We upload the data with a wireless tablet, and many electrocardiogram puzzles are subsequently solved. It improves our diagnostic capability,” said Hu Chaoming, president of Bahe County People’s Hospital in Shaanxi.

By the end of August, the foundation had teamed up with 31 hospitals in one third of Chinese provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities. Qu hopes it can have at least one partner hospital in every provincial-level region.

The foundation has been used in 10 elderly care homes in Beijing, serving more than 60,000 residents.

No Bed of Roses

Since Qu had promised donors that every penny they gave would be used on patients, the foundation had no money to rent an office or even buy stationery in its initial years. The initiators collected used tables and chairs and started in a free basement provided by local authorities. During the first three years, there was insufficient money to pay the staff. Qu sometimes had to pay them out of his own pocket.

The foundation is looking forward to some more ambitious. In 2013, President Xi Jinping proposed building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, which links Asia, Europe, Africa and other regions to allow for greater trade, connectivity and people-to-people exchanges. By the end of July, 136 countries and 30 international organizations had been involved in the initiative.

Qu wants the foundation’s green carpet to roll out in other countries participating in the Belt and Road Initiative and beyond. —With contribution by Liang Yusen