



An interview with Dr Anne Kwan

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An accomplished anaesthetist, Dr Anne Kwan, has devoted her time to serving patients in Hong Kong and China for over 20 years. She received her specialist training in Australia and later worked in the UK, before returning to Hong Kong in 1992. Since then, she has devoted 18 years of service to the public sector and served as the Chief of Service of Anaesthesiology and Pain Medicine at the United Christian Hospital (UCH) until 2011. She is now the medical superintendent of Evangel Hospital.

Dr Kwan's love for charity work dates back to 20 years ago, when she first teamed up with several plastic surgeons to provide free cleft lip and palate surgery in Mainland China. She noticed that children with cleft palate were often sent to orphanages and received fewer education and economic opportunities. Over the past two decades, she has visited more than 20 Mainland hospitals and extended anaesthetic care to remote parts of China. The vast majority of her patients are children with cleft lip and palate, and thanks to Dr Kwan and her colleagues, they are able to return to normal life with a new smile.

Dr Kwan has a soft spot for children with cleft lip and palate. "Anaesthetising infants with difficult airway anatomy requires specialised skill," Dr Kwan remarks, citing the technical challenge as one of the aspects of her work in which she takes pride and finds fulfilment. It was during her work with Dr Edward H Peterson, the first medical superintendent of UCH, that she acquired extensive experience in

intubation of children with difficult airways.

With her special interest and expertise in this area, Dr Kwan also extends this service to the Evangel Hospital. As medical superintendent of Evangel Hospital, she also spearheads a number of charity projects, such as providing dental services to the mentally handicapped, conducting workshops to curb youth substance abuse, carrying out outreach programmes in elderly homes, and working with social workers and local churches to finance first doctor encounters for the reluctant elderly.

Despite her expertise and experience, working in China has not always been easy. Dr Kwan vividly recalls the challenges she faced as the first Hong Kong anaesthetist to volunteer at Sichuan immediately after the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. Most of the patients under her care at West China Hospital suffered from multiple, technically demanding fractures with massive blood loss. The race against time was not made easy by the large number of patients, limited number of experienced local doctors, and the Sichuan dialect which made professional communication in Putonghua challenging.

Why is Dr Kwan so passionate about patient care? She herself has a story to tell. Back in her days as a houseman in Australia, she fell victim to a gas leak in her apartment and suffered burns over 25% of her body. She was hospitalised for a month at the burns unit, where she made remarkable recovery thanks to the technical skills and compassion of her doctors. She recounts her heartfelt gratitude towards

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gave the treatment their best. “Doctors really make a difference to people’s lives,” Dr Kwan summarises.

In addition to the technical aspects of anaesthesiology, Dr Kwan is also attracted to the human side of medicine. She finds her work as an anaesthetist immensely satisfying, and describes passionately how she looks forward to waking her patients after each operation to reassure them that they are safe and well. Her training in pain management gives her ample opportunity to relieve the pain and suffering of patients inflicted with cancer and chronic painful conditions, and to bring them comfort and dignity.

In Dr Kwan’s eyes, being a doctor is a privilege and a commitment, as few occupations bring as much respect and satisfaction. She remarks that being a doctor in Hong Kong is still a highly respectable profession, and challenges one to uphold the exemplary standard of medical care and ethics.

the team of plastic surgeons tending to her, and believes that patients can really tell if their doctors

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Dr Kwan with a cleft lip and palate patient at a Mainland hospital in 2010

(Bottom)

Dr Kwan and her medical team being thanked by Chinese government officials after their service during the Sichuan earthquake in 2008

