Dr. Liu Brings Chinese Transplant Surgeons to Montefiore

Last spring the Montefiore Einstein Department of Pathology, in collaboration with the Department of Surgery, hosted three visiting scholars from China. **Drs. Guoyong Chen, Zhantao Xie and Wang Weiwei** are surgeons specializing in liver and other organ transplantation. They practice at Henan Provincial People’s Hospital, the teaching hospital for Zhengzhou University School of Medicine (ZUSM), where all three received their medical training.

The colleagues were on a mission: In preparation for starting their hospital’s first program in organ transplantation, they came to Montefiore to observe surgical best practices and techniques for liver, kidney and pancreatic transplants. They also took time to meet with researchers at the Marion Bessin Liver Research Center and the Michael F. Price Center for Genetic and Translational Medicine at Albert Einstein College of Medicine.

The idea for the month-long fellowship was initiated by **Qiang Liu, MD** an anatomic and surgical pathologist with expertise in liver transplant surgery. Dr. Liu is a member of the Pathology Department’s Surgical Pathology team and an associate professor of pathology at Einstein. He arranged the educational exchange with **Milan M. Kinkhabwala, MD**, chief of transplantation at Montefiore and founding director of the Montefiore Einstein Center for Transplantation.
Dr. Liu earned his medical degree at ZUSM (then known as Henan Medical University). He came to the United States from China 20 years ago and joined the Montefiore Einstein Department of Pathology in 2007 as an attending physician. During a 2016 visit to Henan Provincial People’s Hospital, he was inspired to offer his fellow alums an opportunity to come to the Bronx and experience Montefiore’s renowned transplant program firsthand.

“This is my way of giving back,” he says.

It was the Mandarin-speaking visitors’ first time in the United States, and they had some degree of difficulty communicating in English. But the combination of their enthusiasm—coupled with Dr. Liu’s formidable skills as a translator, and the friendly, supportive faculty and staff from both departments—went a long way toward conquering the language barrier.

The visiting clinicians scrubbed in the OR, went on procurements, saw biliary cases, came on rounds and attended team meetings. “We made them part of the team,” says Dr. Kinkhabwala, who is also director of abdominal organ transplantation in the department of surgery at the Montefiore Einstein Center for Cancer Care and a professor of surgery at Einstein.

“They were impressed with our multidisciplinary teamwork,” he added. “They see a lot of liver diseases in China. They were very knowledgeable, asked good questions and gave us insightful comments and ideas. It was a two-way interaction.”

The educational exchange was a success for all involved, says Dr. Liu. He hopes to repeat the program with a new group of ZUSM alumni next year.

A Conversation with Dr. Guoyong Chen
Pathology Department News spoke with Dr. Guoyong Chen, director of liver transplant surgery at Henan Provincial People’s Hospital in Zhengzhou, China. Dr. Qiang Liu served as translator.

PDN: Why did you choose to go into medicine and liver transplant surgery?
Dr. Chen: My father is a doctor and, like him, I wanted to save lives. I decided to become a liver transplant surgeon because it’s a relatively new field in China. It’s challenging and exciting.

What are your strongest impressions from your visit to Montefiore? I am very impressed by the teamwork and communication here, including among the researchers. The doctors and nurses at Montefiore are very helpful and friendly. They always want to treat you well and show you their best.

What differences have you observed: Organ transplantation is a relatively new field in China. The surgical techniques at Montefiore are more sophisticated than in China, especially in pancreatic transplantation. In China, the most prevalent form of hepatitis leading to liver transplant is hepatitis B, here it’s hepatitis C. We see many different complications in China, some that you probably haven’t seen before.

What similarities have you observed? Both at Montefiore and at Henan Provincial People’s Hospital the medical staff are very hardworking.
How does organ donation work in China?
We learned the organ donation system from the U.S. and modified it. We have a registry and an online database. You have to pay to get the information from certain websites, which may also be true in the U.S.

The organ shortage is higher in China because of cultural beliefs. Most donated livers come from local and national organizations. You must be a resident of the area where the donor organ is located, just like here in the U.S. There are strict rules and regulations.

How do you view the role of pathologist in transplant surgery? It’s very important for transplant surgeons to work with pathologists. For example, if there is a rejection, we want to know: Was it caused by the [immunosuppressant] drug or by an infection? The field of pathology needs to be developed more in China. We have a shortage of pathologists. We need a system for remote consultations in both surgery and pathology.

Why is this kind of educational exchange important? It’s very useful to see surgical techniques firsthand. It’s much better than reading about transplant surgery in a journal. Different countries have different methods, and we can learn from each other.

Visitors and host unmasked: from left, Drs. Zhantao Xie, Wang Weiwei, Guoyong Chen and Qiang Liu.
Dr. Kinkhabwala in his office with Dr. Chen.
Dr. Liu and Dr. Chen in the waiting room of the Montefiore Einstein Transplant Center with Montefiore associates (from left) Rebecca Cajigas, Taneiry Castillo and Florence Lee.
Drs. Guoyong, Zhantao and Wang visited the Marion Bessin Liver Research Center located on Einstein’s Jack and Pearl Resnick Campus. They received a warm welcome from Dr. Alan Wolkoff, center, director of the Bessin Center, and faculty members Drs. Xia Wang, Liang Zhu (first and third from left) and Xintao Wang (second from right), and research technician Ms. Pi-Jun Wang (far right).

After an informal discussion in the conference room and a tour of Dr. Zhu’s lab, the hosts led their guests on a tour of the Michael F. Price Center for Genetic and Translational Medicine/Block Research Pavilion, which included a visit the laboratory of Dr. Wenjun Guo, associate professor of cell biology.
A fond farewell. The three visiting liver transplant surgeons were the guests of honor at a farewell lunch hosted by Dr. Kinkhabwala at the RedFarm restaurant in Manhattan. From left: Dr. Zhantao Xie, Dr. Jay Graham, Dr. Weiwei Wang, Dr. Milan Kinkhabwala, Dr. Sara Bellemare, Dr. Guoyong Chen and Dr. Qiang Liu.