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Children add to nursing co-op's rewards



Senior Kenneth Wong recently completed a nursing co-op in China working with children suffering from severe burns. *Courtesy photo*

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Kenneth Wong recalls the pain of watching children suffer from severe burns and their families struggling to cope. It was a difficult part of his nursing **co-op** experience in China earlier this year, but he said it was also incredibly rewarding to observe many of those children get better over time, thanks to the care he helped provide.

"It was great to see these kids run around like other kids. I felt like we did so much for them so they could live a better life," said the Northeastern University senior **nursing** major of his experiential learning opportunity.

Wong's co-op was through HandReach, an international network of medical professionals and volunteers that provides poor children with serious injuries, such as severe burns, with quality health care. From January through April, Wong worked primarily at the Air Force General Hospital in Beijing. He also worked for part of his co-op at two other hospitals in Changsha, the capital of China's Hunan Province.

While on co-op, Wong gained invaluable experience working with doctors and nurses. He prepared burn dressings and assisted during surgeries. In his nursing role, Wong set up patients with oxygen, recorded their vital signs, drew blood, and administered intravenous medication.

But his interaction with his young patients left the greatest impression on him. He said the medical staff also treated him as one of their own.

"I felt like part of their family. It was amazing to be so close to something that was so foreign to me," he said.

Despite knowing Cantonese, one big challenge he encountered was learning the Mandarin dialect, which the hospital workers spoke. But he took the initiative to compile his own English-Mandarin dictionary of key medical terms. Wong also shared it with health professionals there to help them learn English, and he hopes to pass it along to future Northeastern co-op students.

In July, Northeastern physical therapy faculty members Lorna Hayward and Ann Louise Charrette, accompanied by graduate student and translator Li Li, will travel to China to help doctors at JianShe Hospital in Changsha establish a pediatric rehabilitation room for patients, and to explore the possibility of setting up a permanent co-op program.

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