

CHINA DISEASE DIPLOMACY: FROM CHINA TO ATLANTA TO SIERRA LEONE

The 2014 Ebola outbreak marked the first time China led their own response to a large-scale public health event. The Chinese government built a new lab in Sierra Leone, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta had a laboratory technique that would help them. As Chinese nationals, Drs. ShuYu Wu and Yuzhi Zhang of GDD China were uniquely able to cross language and travel barriers to bring the technique to Africa.

Neither ShuYu nor Yuzhi had ever been to Africa or worked on an international outbreak response before. They were scheduled to arrive in Sierra Leone in mid-September 2014. But first they would have to travel from China to Atlanta, GA, for specialized laboratory training.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

The two laboratory experts traveled to Atlanta before going to Sierra Leone to be further trained by Ebola experts working in the Viral Special Pathogens laboratory. While in Atlanta, they kept in close contact with Chinese laboratorians in Sierra Leone to discuss the training and equipment needed to carry out the diagnostic tests. “We held teleconferences with China’s Jui Lab and discussed with CDC in Atlanta what, if any, modifications we could make if certain equipment was not available,” says Yuzhi.

MAKING DO AND GETTING RESULTS

Armed with specialized training and hours of interaction with the Chinese laboratory, the two set off for Sierra Leone. Even with all the preparation and support they received in Atlanta, they still faced challenges when they arrived in Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone has limited resources; safe water is scarce. Even basic services failed them. Says Yuzhi, “We encountered power outages almost every day.”

On a typical day during their deployment, they spent about 8 hours in the lab working side-by-side with Chinese laboratorians. Every night, they communicated with colleagues in Atlanta to discuss the day’s results and problems and troubleshoot for the next day. It wasn’t long before the test worked as planned and results were shared with the responders.

A REWARDING COLLABORATION

The deployment was a rewarding experience for the two scientists. “Working together and sharing experiences helps improve trust and collaboration between the United States and China,” says Yuzhi.

This work was supported by CDC’s [Viral Special Pathogens Branch](#) in partnership with [China CDC](#).

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Yuzhi and ShuYu show laboratory staff how to perform the diagnostic test.

Read the full story: http://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/healthprotection/gdd/stories/disease_diplomacy_china.html