Chinese Hospital founded in San Francisco due to discrimination

By Henry Lee

San Francisco's only independent hospital, the Chinese Hos[ital, started more than 120 years ago as a way to address discrimination in healthcare is today expanding its services.

Chinese Hospital, in the heart of Chinatown, opened back in 1899 as a dispensary, as a result of anti-Asian discrimination.

"When they were sick, they were actually not allowed to go to the mainstream hospitals," said Jian Zhang, the hospital's CEO. "They were united and said, 'Let's build our own.' "

Fast forward to today.

Zhang says so much has changed, yet some things stay the same.

"They blamed Chinese for bringing in or spread tuberculosis, and now, 120 years later, they blame Chinese for bringing in COVID," she said.

Zhang recently gave KTVU a tour of the hospital on Jackson Street.

She says it's the only independent hospital left in San Francisco. It offers medical, surgical, and specialty care and also has a 24-hour emergency room.

Some rooms boast scenic views.

Each floor has its own unique pastel color. The second floor is peach.

"This is the skilled nursing facility. It was built – but not opened – in 2016," Zhang said of the second floor.

"When the coronavirus first showed up in 2020, the state needed more beds – quickly. The hospital helped out.

"We quickly got this floor licensed so we could take patients from Zuckerberg SF General Hospital," Zhang said.

Then-Assemblymember David Chiu helped out with the licensing. He also got all three of his covid shots here.

But so much was unknown when covid first reared its head.

"I could say it was a nightmare, actually," Zhang said.

But the hospital was able to limit the number of COVID cases with an education and prevention campaign. It set up a trilingual hotline in English, Mandarin and Cantonese. It offered COVID testing.

They got calls from worried people across the country.

But even in San Francisco, the anti-Asian discrimination was harder to fend off.

"Our employees received a lot of you know when they take public transportation, they were yelled at and told to go back to China," Zhang said.

Zhang says the science is clear.

"Coronavirus is a virus. It can infect anybody regardless of your color. It had nothing to with Chinese," she said. "It's not right to call it a Chinese virus."

And Chinese Hospital is at the forefront in the ongoing fight against covid.

"There are so many Chinese or Asian providers out there, front-line workers out there fighting against coronavirus, right, so we are very much part of the contributor actually," she said.

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