

Siberia's medical train

The famous Trans-Siberian railway line goes from Moscow to Vladivostok, but there's another railway line about 650 kilometres north of the Trans-Siberian. This is the Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM). A special train, the *Matvei Mudrov* medical train, travels along its 4,000 kilometres. There are usually between twelve and fifteen doctors on the train. The train stops for a day at places along the BAM. The people who live in small towns and villages come to the train for medical attention. There are no doctors or hospitals in their towns or villages. For these patients, their health centre is on the train.

The *Matvei Mudrov* was named after a Russian doctor in the nineteenth century. Nowadays, the *Matvei Mudrov* visits each town or village on the BAM twice a year. In the village of Khani (population 742), the patients include a man with two broken ankles and a teenage girl. She had appendicitis a month ago and she was lucky to travel to a town three hours away for an operation. The *Matvei Mudrov* doesn't have any equipment to do operations. The doctors can diagnose their patients' medical problems and recommend treatment and medicines. The train has a laboratory for blood and urine tests and a number of medical testing machines. The patients like the doctors on the train. They say they are honest and good at their jobs.

Next stop is a town called Berkakit. About 4,000 people live here. There is a queue to see the doctors. Mikhail Zdanovich is waiting for his turn. He's 61 years old and he came to Berkakit in 1976. At the time, only about a hundred young people lived in Berkakit. It was a new town. Zdanovich met a woman who worked at the town bakery. They married and stayed in the town. When Zdanovich walks into the doctor's office she says 'Oh, Mikhail, I recognised your voice.' He has a problem in his shoulder. The doctor writes a letter to say that he can't work, he must have an operation. He leaves, happy, and then he returns a few minutes later. He brings freshly cooked pies and some goat's milk.

For the people who live in this remote part of Russia, the *Matvei Mudrov* is more than a medical train. It's a social connection to the community of their country.

Glossary

diagnose (v) to say what is wrong with someone who is ill

appendicitis (n) an illness where a small part inside your body, under your stomach, becomes bigger than usual and painful

queue (n) a line of people who are waiting for something

Keywords

ankle (n) the part of the body between the foot and the leg

equipment (n) the things that you need to do a particular activity or task

medical (adj) related to medicine and ways to treat people who are ill

medicine (n) something used to treat people who are ill or injured

operation (n) cutting the body to remove or repair a part of it

patient (n) a person who is being treated for an illness or injury

shoulder (n) the part of the body between the arm and the neck

treatment (n) the use of medicine, etc. when someone is ill