

Siberia's medical train

The famous Trans-Siberian railway line runs from Moscow to Vladivostok, but there's another line about 650 kilometres north of the Trans-Siberian. This is the Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM) and a special train, the *Matvei Mudrov* medical train, travels along its 4,000 kilometres. The train, with its twelve to fifteen doctors, spends a day in each of the small towns and villages along the BAM. The inhabitants of these remote places depend on this service because they mostly don't have regular access to any other health care.

The *Matvei Mudrov* was named after a Russian doctor in the nineteenth century. He was one of the first doctors to believe that you shouldn't only look at the disease, but you should also treat the individual patient. Nowadays, the *Matvei Mudrov* stops in each town or village on the BAM about twice a year. In the village of Khani (population 742) the patients include a man who has broken both ankles and a teenage girl who needs a check-up after surgery for appendicitis. Luckily, she was able to get to a town three hours away for the operation. Although the *Matvei Mudrov* can't offer surgery, the train has a laboratory for blood and urine tests, heart monitors, an ultrasound and an x-ray machine. The medical staff includes specialists, such as neurologists, and they can diagnose and recommend treatment for their patients. The patients say they respect the doctors' honesty and skill.

At another of the train's stops, a town of about 4,000 people, there is already a queue of people waiting. 61-year-old Mikhail Zdanovich is one of them. He originally came to this town, Berkakit, in 1976. At the time it was a new town, with only about a hundred young people living in camp conditions. It was part of a Soviet Union expansion plan. Zdanovich married a woman who worked at the town bakery and they settled in the town. As soon as Zdanovich goes into the office, the doctor, Yelena Miroshnichenko, cries 'Oh, Mikhail, I recognised your voice.' He has a dislocated shoulder. The doctor writes a letter to say that he can't work while he's waiting for his shoulder to be treated. He leaves, happy, and then he returns a few minutes later. He brings freshly baked pies and a jar of goat's milk. It's clear that after years on the *Matvei Mudrov*, the doctors and their patients know each other well.

And, in fact, for these people living in this remote part of Russia, the *Matvei Mudrov* is more than just a health service. It's a connection to the rest of their country, a confirmation that they are not forgotten.

Glossary:

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

dislocated (adj) if a part of the body is not in its usual position, it is *dislocated*

Keywords:

check-up (n) a medical examination

connection (n) a relationship between two things

inhabitant (n) a person who lives in a place

jar (n) a glass container for food or drink

laboratory (n) a room used for medical or scientific work

neurologist (n) a doctor of the brain and nervous system

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

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

specialist (n) a person who has knowledge or skill in a subject

staff (n) a group of people who work for the same organisation