

Drama helps reaffirm life for cancer patients

A drama written, directed and performed by people with cancer will take the stage of the China Millennium Monument Theatre in Beijing on Friday to serve as encouragement and inspiration for cancer patients to live a better life.

Friday is the 17th International Lung Cancer Day.

The drama, *Oh, Don't Be Afraid*, a coproduction of Shanghai Cancer Recovery Club and Jiefang Daily, tells the story of a late-stage cancer patient who helps a young lung cancer patient regain the courage to live through acting.

Jiefang Daily is the newspaper of the Shanghai Committee of the Communist Party of China.

Based on real-life experiences, the drama is directed and written by Dai Rong, a lung cancer patient. It also includes seven cancer patients among its 12 cast members.

"The drama itself acts as a kind of psychological therapy, using the power of the arts to heal both the audience and the actors," said Dai, a director at the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center, who was diagnosed with lung cancer along with multiple bone metastases five years ago.

Feeling hopeless after her diagnosis, Dai sought support from the Shanghai Cancer Recovery Club, one of the country's first grassroots organizations for cancer patients. In its 28-year history, the club has helped 200,000 people come to terms with their illness and fight it.

From the club, Dai learned about drama therapy, which has since redefined her life purpose. She started to direct films, dramas and television programs again. She is also the organizer of a drama-healing workshop to help more patients, where drama therapy is utilized as a kind of therapeutic intervention.

"Years ago, I wondered what it means to be a director, but now I've got the answer," Dai said. "It is to help cancer patients like me delve into truths about themselves, release their negative emotions and be optimistic toward life."

As Dai's first therapeutic production, *Oh, Don't Be Afraid* is also thought to be the first of its kind in the country. Since its early October debut in Shanghai, Dai's hometown, it has received extensive acclaim from both the actors and audiences.

Lu Lanzhen, an eight-year breast cancer patient starring in the drama, said: "I feel warmth and release from the bottom of my heart whenever I am in the play. We are sharing our own stories with the audience and hope to encourage more patients."

Zheng Ying, director of the cancer prevention department at Fudan University's Shanghai Cancer Center, said drama therapy is presented as a rehabilitation option for cancer patients, many of whom have better prognoses thanks to improved diagnostics and treatment methods.

According to the World Health Organization, lung cancer remains the biggest cause of cancer-related deaths in China. The country reports 800,000 new cases of lung cancer each year. Experts predict the number will be close to 1 million by 2025.