The basic unit of the Chinese language is the zi (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each zi has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string zi together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

This week: Words about health and healing


醫院 (yi yuan = medicine-institution = hospitals) hire 醫生 (yi sheng = medical-man = doctors). Patients respect 良醫 (liang yi = good-doctors), despise 庸醫 (yong yi = mediocre/bad-doctors). Chronic patients 久病成醫 (jiu bing cheng yi = longtime-ill-become-doctor = long illness makes them medical experts).

China’s 醫療改革 (yi liao gai ge = medicine-healing-change-overturn = health care reform) implements 醫藥分家 (yi yao fen jia = doctors-drugs-separate-family = putting doctors and pharmacies under separate administrations).

Pronunciation: yi (Putonghua, 1st tone), yi (Cantonese, 1st tone)
Basic meaning: medicine, doctor

by Diana Yue