

Educational Opportunities (cont.)

Ms. Mary Yang
Health Care East and West Moving into the 21st Century Conference
Cambridge, Massachusetts
June 24-30, 2001

I had the opportunity to attend the Health Care East and West Moving into the 21st Century Conference held at MIT on June 24-30, 2001, with the support of \$250 from your organization, ASIAM Institute for Research & Education.

I am currently a second year medical student at Pitt. This summer I started taking classes at CMU for my masters in Health Care Policy and Management. My interest is in Health Care Policy and the fact that I was born and raised in P.R. of China until I was ten years old led me to believe that the conference would be something that is appropriate and worthwhile for me, and indeed it has turned out to be a wonderful experience.

This particular health care conference represents a unique opportunity for everyone to think through fundamental issues on how to improve the health of the people of both countries. At many levels (cultural, political, social) China and the US have many differences, which have contributed to differences in health care delivery. As China is moving more toward a free and capitalistic society and as the US is considering a universal approach to providing health care, both countries are faced with many challenges and obstacles. The organizers of the conference have arranged for plenary speakers and moderators who will describe the operation of the health care system in each of the two countries, both in theory and in practice. There was a broad spectrum of topics that were presented and discussed. Some of the presentations that I attended included the different services that are provided in the two countries, the difference of disease patterns in the two countries, American views on Chinese health care and Chinese views on American health care and traditional, complementary or alternative medicine.

It was very educational for me to attend the presentation. However, what I gained most from the conference was that the presenters made me re-think certain issues and made me realize that there are different ways to look at an issue. These presenters challenged me. For example, currently there is this great urgency in China's health care field to catch up to the rest of the industrialized countries. As a result, large hospitals are spending millions of dollars on new technology and sending doctors to other countries for training. However, **William Hsiao, PhD**, Professor of Economics at Harvard School of Public Health, questioned the audience about who is really gaining the benefit from all this new technology. The answer is that only a very small population in China benefits, because in China only a handful of hospitals that are located in large cities have the money or space for the new technology. Most of the Chinese population is in the rural areas where there is great need for the most basic health care. For the same amount of money that has been spent on CT scans which only helped a small number of people, a village may be able to get clean water which would in turn save many more lives. What Dr. Hsiao was proposing was that the Chinese government should look more into public health issues than into buying the most advanced technology.

In conclusion, I really appreciated the support of ASIAM. If I had not had the funding, I would have not been able to attend the conference. I plan to further my knowledge of health policy and hope that in the future I will be able to contribute positively to the health care field.