AUDIOLOGY TRAINING PROGRAM IN BEIJING

By Christina Stocking

In collaboration with the General Hospital of the People’s Liberation Army in Beijing, the UB Department of Communicative Disorders and Sciences (CDS) has organized an audiology clinical training program that has run for three weeks each summer in 2013 and 2014.

We were invited by Dr. Wang Qiuju, who is the professor and director of the Chinese PLA Institute of Otolaryngology, and has research associations with Wei Sun, associate professor in CDS. The inaugural program was titled “Sino-US Joint Training of the Audiological Physicians and Audiologists Project.”

Eleven audiology students and four audiology faculty members participated in this program each summer in 2013 and 2014. The hosting hospital is one of the finest hospitals in China. The Department of Otolaryngology is incredibly busy with ear surgery, including cochlear implants and middle ear device implantation, as well as treating a wide range of auditory and vestibular disorders.

Their audiology group administers state of the art audiological tests, including auditory steady-state response test, newborn hearing and gene screening, vestibular tests, cochlear implant mapping and hearing aid fitting.

During each three-week program, the students had opportunities to work with the local otolaryngologists and audiologists on clinical cases and research projects. They had hands-on experience testing patients and opportunities to observe cochlear implant surgery as well as surgery to remove acoustic neuromas. Accommodation was generously provided by our hosts.

In addition, each year we attended a two-day conference for audiological physicians in China, where Wei Sun, Christina Stocking, and Nancy Stecker were among the presenters. Our faculty and students as well as Richard Salvi gave talks to the hospital staff, Chinese students and research groups.

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The credential for an audiologist in this country is a professional doctorate degree, requiring 4 years of graduate education. The four-year program includes three years of coursework, along side clinical practicum, and then a fourth-year full-time clinical externship. Students must also complete and present a significant research project within the first 3 years.

In China, until recently, there was no such audiology degree program. In China, audiological physicians are medical doctors who choose to concentrate their practice in the non-surgical realm of treating hearing disorders. They work with technicians who perform routine hearing testing.

Now, the first audiology degree program has been established in Zhejiang Chinese Medical University, which offers a bachelors degree program in audiology. Last year, one audiology student worked in the UB Center for Hearing and Deafness as a visiting scholar. We plan to recruit more students to come to UB for further graduate studies.

Aside from the unique experiences our students obtained with clinical practice and research, these visits also provided the opportunity to learn about the Chinese culture and their health care system. We worked side by side with the Chinese audiologists and physicians and enjoyed getting to know them as friends.

Our hosts were very generous about introducing our group to local food, customs, and sights. We were able to visit several of the most famous sites in and around Beijing, including the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace, and the Great Wall of China. We also visited Chende, a mountain resort city that used to be a palace for the emperors as their summer residence, and Taiyuan, a beautiful modern and historical city west of Beijing.

Here are some reflections from a few of our students:

Tara Warren: In the hospital ward, we donned white coats continued on page 16
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and assisted the staff during audiological evaluations. We observed methods of treatment much different from what we learn at home to manage various disorders including sudden deafness, and tinnitus. One of the most exciting encounters was the day we scrubbed in to the operating room and observed the removal of an acoustic neuroma, and the implantation of a cochlear implant.

When we were not at the hospital, we were generously guided around by volunteers from the hospital to China's most important historic and cultural sites, including the Forbidden City, the Great Wall of China, the Silk market, and the Pearl market. We were invited into the homes of the doctors to join their families for traditional Chinese meals. These included delicacies of Peking duck, roast lamb, and Ting dynasty style feasts. Never did we leave hungry!

Although it is impossible to encapsulate three weeks into one paragraph, if there is one thing I can highlight it would be the grace, pride, and friendliness of the Chinese people. I am very thankful to have experienced this tremendous opportunity and will forever remember this trip along my journey in the field of audiology.

Vanessa Rogers: In the outpatient clinic I was able to assist in mapping a cochlear implant on a child, adjust the map for an adult, as well as perform various evoked potential testing on all ages. Although the language was different, it was amazing because I was still able to understand the procedures and processes. I became close with several of the audiologists, physicians and nurses. It was very rewarding to get to know each other on a personal and professional level. They were intrigued about my culture and education as a student in America, just as I was curious to learn about the Chinese culture, way of life, and education of audiologists in China.

Madeline Vojak: Having the opportunity to live in Beijing, China is an once-in-a-lifetime experience within itself but also being able to be personally involved with the doctors, audiologists, nurses, and patients in a Chinese Hospital was remarkable. While applying to graduate schools, I never would have thought that by choosing the University at Buffalo it would take me to the opposite side of the world! If I were currently an undergraduate student, knowing that UB provided such vast clinical experiences would definitely put UB at the top of my list.

We were able to witness what it was like to be a patient in China. In the US, we make an appointment with our doctor and complain about waiting an hour past our appointment time. In China, it's standard for patients to draw numbers (similar to a grocery store deli) and wait for their number to be called. The halls were packed with patients and their families, patiently waiting to be seen. My heart went out to these patients and the overworked doctors. China has taught me to not worry about what is on my schedule, but to focus on the current patient.

Our stay in China was life altering for many reasons. Staying in western Beijing, we all were able to see the culture on a daily basis with minimal westernization. We bought fruit on street corners, took the subway on a daily basis, and ate traditional Chinese food for almost every meal. (Yes, we did have McDonalds once or twice...) One of the greatest things I took away from China was how gracious their people are.

The experiences gained in China will have an impact on my professional and personal life throughout my lifetime and I am forever thankful for all the hard work that went into planning the Sino-US Joint Training of the Audiological Physicians and Audiologists Program.

Sarah Hayes: As a graduate student interested in both clinical care and research, an important aspect of my future career will be to address the fact that hearing loss, tinnitus, and other audiologic disorders are global health problems. Establishing research and clinical collaborations with scientists and clinicians from diverse countries can accelerate our understanding of audiologic disorders. The opportunity to visit and work alongside the clinical and research staff at the PLA General Hospital in Beijing has not only allowed me to learn about audiologic diagnosis and patient care in China, but has also allowed me to establish research and clinical relationships with audiologists and scientists worldwide. I am very excited to have made so many new friends during our trip and to continue collaborating on future research projects.

Since returning from our trip, we have hosted several Chinese visitors who have come to study here on a more long-term basis. Chao Zhang, an audiologist, and Dr. Jun Liu, an otolaryngologist, spent one year conducting research on tinnitus and hyperacusis in the Center for Hearing and Deafness with Dr. Sun. Dr. Liu also brought his 5 year old daughter, Xingyi, who attended Kindergarten at Windermere Elementary School in Amherst.

We look forward to an on-going cooperative relationship between Beijing and Buffalo with the purposes of educational and research exchange in the fields of audiology and hearing science, as we continue to build long lasting friendships with our Chinese colleagues.

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