Health Care Evolution
UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP ALLOWS DU TO HELP CHINA WITH NEED FOR REHABILITATION SPECIALISTS

By Rose Ravasio, A’90

With China’s booming population aging and living longer, the nation is experiencing a critical need for health care professionals who specialize in physical therapy and occupational therapy.

The John G. Rangos School of Health Sciences, through its partnership with the Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine (SHUTCM), is hosting 14 health care professionals from China who are taking classes as part of a unique program designed to help them specialize in physical therapy and occupational therapy.

The arrangement was developed with backing from the Chinese government, and Duquesne is the only American university involved in such an arrangement.

“In many of China’s universities and medical schools, they only have a rehabilitation school or department, and what they offer is more comprehensive treatment, rather than a specialty like physical therapy or occupational therapy,” explains Associate Professor of Speech-Language Pathology Dr. Yang Chen, who worked with Rangos Dean Dr. Greg Frazer to develop the program. “Now, there is a big need for rehab, but they don’t have enough manpower to fill that need.”

Through the partnership, the SHUTCM sends eligible Chinese health care professionals to Duquesne to earn a master’s degree in rehabilitation sciences with concentrations in either physical therapy or occupational therapy.

“In China, they want to add specialties to their rehabilitation programs, but they don’t have the faculty members to do it. And in the hospitals, they don’t have the qualified specialists,” says Chen.

Since 2011, the Rangos school has been sponsoring short-term study abroad programs in China and that is how the SHUTCM collaboration developed.

“I take great pride in the fact that our Chinese partners have such trust in our faculty and Duquesne University to assist with the evolution of rehabilitation services in China,” says Frazer.

Student Dongmei Ai is in the physical therapy track. “This program is important because of the urgent demand of high-level physical therapists and occupational therapists in China, and the techniques and knowledge of therapists can be insufficient,” says Ai. “I plan to be a physical therapist in a hospital and, in the long run, I hope to become a faculty member at a college of rehabilitation so that I can teach Chinese students all the contemporary knowledge that I know.”

Of the students participating in the program, nine are taking classes through the Department of Physical Therapy and five through the Department of Occupational Therapy for three straight semesters of study. The group will graduate in August. The first cohort of 12 students graduated, returned to China and assumed positions within the country’s health care system.

Memorial Scholarship Pays Tribute to Business Student

The Ryan Fleming Memorial Scholarship pays tribute to a young man whose hard work and kind nature continue to inspire others. Fleming, a sophomore business student, passed away in 2014 at age 20. Duquesne students now receive support in Fleming’s name through the generosity of the Xerox Corporation.

Fleming was the eldest son of Thomas P. Fleming Jr., superintendent of the Richland School District, and Cambria County Judge Linda Fleming. A high school letterman in football and basketball, he shared a love for athletics with his father, a former high school football coach.

In 2013, he was diagnosed with Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome, a condition in which an extra electrical pathway in the heart leads to episodes of rapid heart rate, which eventually took his life.

During Fleming’s first year at Duquesne, he became a student assistant to director of football operations John Rosato. Fleming’s uncle was Duquesne head coach Jerry Schmitt, but few of the players or staff members were aware of the connection.

“Ryan refused to call him ‘Uncle Jerry,’” explains his father. “He didn’t want anybody to think he got any kind of special attention.”

Thomas Merlie, senior client manager at Xerox, knew Ryan Fleming and admired his determination, resourcefulness and selflessness.

“Everybody who met him liked him. He knew everyone. No one said a bad thing about him. He had an engaging, soothing, feel-good personality,” recalls Merlie. “He wasn’t a big-time college athlete, but he was part of college athletics in a profound way. Ryan always found ways to be a part of something bigger. If he couldn’t find one way to do something, he’d find an alternate route—one that would benefit others.”

Fleming’s altruism is reflected in the business association between Duquesne and Xerox.

“In our desire to foster a partnership, we want to go above and beyond the standard business relationship between vendor and institution,” explains Merlie. “We want to participate, to be involved in a larger sense, and to contribute in a way that benefits the desires and needs of Duquesne students.”

Sophomore Christine DeAndrea and freshman Katherine Narasimha, both enrolled in the physician assistant studies program, are the inaugural recipients of this scholarship for this academic year.

“Ryan Fleming personified the type of student whom we hope will benefit from his namesake scholarship,” says Merlie. “We at Xerox hope that the scholarship benefits as many students as possible—young men and women who need the help and who will work hard every day.”