

WORLD GROWS SMALLER FOR DREAMERS

by Elizabeth Kumru

KANGMU MA HAS A DREAM.

SINCE CHILDHOOD, HE'S WANTED TO BE A SCIENTIST OR DOCTOR.

Now, he's working to accomplish both. The 24-year-old native of Shanghai wants to be the best of the best and he believes that to be the best physician, he also needs to be the best researcher.

Ma, who goes by the nickname "Ben," is the first Chinese student to enter the new Physician Scientist Graduate Training Program (PSGTP), a joint M.D./Ph.D. program between UNMC and Shanghai Jiao Tong University School of Medicine (SJTUSM).

"This program is a great chance for medical students to have a more complete education," Ma said. "When I started my medical training in China, I found it was not enough for today's professional to provide the best care. The training at UNMC will allow me to understand the disease more thoroughly and be able to translate treatments between the laboratory and clinic."

Kangmu Ma is the first participant in the joint M.D./Ph.D. program between UNMC and Shanghai Jiao Tong University School of Medicine.

Under the program, students spend their first two years in medical school at SJTUSM and then come to UNMC for four years to earn their Ph.D., before returning to SJTUSM for two years to earn their medical degree.

Instrumental in developing UNMC's relationships with China is Jialin Zheng, M.D., who earned his medical degree in his native China. Dr. Zheng began his postdoctoral research training at UNMC in 1993 and is now associate dean of graduate studies-international affairs, director of the Asia Pacific Rim Development Program and a professor in the UNMC departments of pharmacology/experimental neuroscience and pathology/microbiology.

"With effort, support and hard work from all PSGTP committee members, we have adapted UNMC's well-built M.D./Ph.D. training model and the Biomedical Research Training Program mechanism to establish this new program with our collaborators at SJTUSM," Dr. Zheng said. "The joint M.D./Ph.D. program allows Chinese medical students to put two perspectives together and better understand diseases."

Initiation of the joint M.D./Ph.D. program, one of the first of its kind between the United States and China, was based on an agreement Tom Rosenquist, Ph.D., vice chancellor for research, signed last year with SJTUSM President Zhenggang Zhu when Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman's delegation visited Shanghai.

The program was officially inaugurated in August when UNMC Chancellor Harold M. Maurer, M.D., signed the final agreement with SJTUSM while in China.

The China Scholarship Council (CSC) program provides \$1,050 a month for Ma's stipend and UNMC supplements an additional \$750 to total the equivalent of what other graduate

students receive. As with other graduate students, UNMC also waives Ma's tuition.

Over the past few years, UNMC has developed a strong relationship with the CSC under the leadership of Drs. Maurer and Rosenquist, Don Leuenberger, vice chancellor for business and finance, Rubens Pamies, M.D., vice chancellor of academic affairs, and others, Dr. Zheng said.

While in China this past October, UNMC's delegation, led by Leuenberger, signed a formal agreement with the CSC to accept Ph.D. students from other top Chinese universities. In addition, the new agreement allows UNMC to accept Ph.D. students and postdoctoral fellows, who will be partially supported by the CSC, to all UNMC colleges. Next year, UNMC plans to accept up to three M.D./Ph.D. students to the PSGTP and up to 10 CSC-supported students.

"Education is very important for friendship," Dr. Zheng said. "Friendships last forever – from generation to generation. It allows us to build a bridge between China and Omaha."

Ma, who pulled his American name "Ben" out of a hat in English class when he was 8 years old, comes from a family steeped in medicine. His grandfather, an internist, and grandmother, a pediatrician, were famous physicians in Shanghai. Before retirement, both of them were chiefs of physicians at a Shanghai hospital, Ma said.

"They are proud, as am I, that I've followed my dream," he said.



UNMC Chancellor Harold M. Maurer, M.D., talks about UNMC's newest program with China. www.unmc.edu/discover

PH.D. STUDENTS FROM CHINA ALSO ATTEND UNMC

Kangmu Ma joins nine other students from China who are financially supported by the China Scholarship Council program this year. These students work on their Ph.D. degrees through the Medical Sciences Interdepartmental Area, and UNMC's colleges of public health, medicine and pharmacy.

Xiaoning Zou, director of SJTUSM's Project Hope Office, said UNMC's collaboration with SJTUSM outshines programs with other U.S. institutions.

"We cooperate with different medical schools," he said. "The relationship with your university I think is the best. You really do something with the faculty and students going back and forth. The action is real. With other schools, we often see no action."

Leaders of institutions and government officials in China have recognized that UNMC keeps its promises, said Jialin Zheng, M.D., director of the Asia Pacific Rim Development Program. "It's what sets UNMC apart."

SJTUSM sends six medical students to Omaha for three months of clinical rotations. The school has sent four groups of students to UNMC. Starting in August, UNMC will send four medical students to Shanghai three times a year for one month with a maximum complement of 12 students participating per year.

In nursing, four UNMC students annually spend a month in Shanghai, and SJTUSM sends four of its students to UNMC.

"The students really want to come to Omaha," Dr. Zheng said, noting that 19 percent of UNMC's post docs hail from China.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

A UNMC committee was formed to carry out the tasks associated with the newly established joint UNMC-SJTUSM M.D./Ph.D. program. Along with Dr. Zheng, committee members are:

STEVEN HINRICHS, M.D., chairman, Stokes-Shackelford professor and chairman of the department of pathology/microbiology and senior associate dean for research, serves as chairman of the PSGTP committee;

DAVID CROUSE, PH.D., associate vice chancellor, academic affairs, executive associate dean, graduate studies, and professor, genetics cell biology;

KAI FU, M.D., PH.D., assistant professor, pathology/microbiology;

DAN MONAGHAN, PH.D., director, Biomedical Research Training Program, and professor and director, pharmacology/experimental neuroscience;

GERALD MOORE, M.D., professor, rheumatology, and senior associate dean for academic affairs;

DEBRA ROMBERGER, M.D., co-director, UNMC Ph.D.- M.D. program, and professor, pulmonology;

SHELLEY SMITH, PH.D., director, UNMC Ph.D.- M.D. program, and professor, molecular genetics, Munroe-Meyer Institute; and

MARY CAVELL, APRDP coordinator.