

# New China, UMass Psychiatry partnership could help millions

By Dennis Nealon

A new academic collaboration between the Shanghai Mental Health Center (SMHC) in China and the UMass Department of Psychiatry joins two of the leading forces in global mental health and marks the official beginning of a tremendously important relationship between east and west.

Signed in January 2013, the agreement has enormous potential for advancing the science and clinical care of mental disorders, according to the UMass Medical School team whose visits to and negotiations in China helped to make it possible – Psychiatry Department Chairman Douglas Ziedonis, MD, MPH, and Xiaoduo Fan, MD, MPH, associate professor of psychiatry and director of the Psychotic Disorders Clinical & Research Program.

“We are extremely optimistic about what we stand to accomplish together,” says Dr. Ziedonis. “We expect that our work could impact millions of people around the world who suffer with some form of mental illness or addiction.”

The mental health care system in China is still underdeveloped, according to Dr. Ziedonis. Programs and techniques that have been widely used in the west for decades have not been introduced in China – or in many other countries. And China urgently needs more qualified mental health professionals to address the rapidly growing mental illness and addiction problems of the modern age.

The Chinese National Center for Mental Health has estimated that China has at least 100 million people suffering from mental illness, which has surpassed heart disease and cancer as the biggest burden on the Chinese health system.

“How do we help people with their recovery, not only in China but elsewhere, as well?” “What new tools and techniques can we advance together to help transform lives?” “These are the key vantage points we will be working from with Shanghai Mental Health Center,” said Dr. Fan.

Principal goals of the new memorandum of understanding with Shanghai Mental Health Center and UMass Psychiatry include the academic and clinical interchange of faculty, postdoctoral fellows, residents and students, and the sharing of clinical, academic and research information between the two institutions. The agreement also covers joint biomedical research, medical education and resident training.

The new partnership also provides UMass trainees and faculty rich opportunities to develop cultural competency and global perspective on health and disease, and to learn how traditional Chinese medicine including acupuncture might be used to treat mental illness.

“Our academic and research peers in China have a lot to show and teach us,” said Dr. Fan, “and we look forward to learning from them.”



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Min Zhao, MD, professor of psychiatry and vice president, Shanghai Mental Health Center, Shanghai Jiaotong University School of Medicine, is a key partner in the new agreement.

One of the world's largest mental health centers, the SMHC treats an estimated one million patients per year in the most-populated city in the world (23 million). The UMass Department of Psychiatry is one of the largest departments of psychiatry in the United States, with 330 faculty members and 2,000 staff members, and the leading provider of psychiatric services in Central Massachusetts. The department is at the forefront of mental health and addiction research, clinical service and education, and is a national model for public and private-sector psychiatry. The department has been extending its global reach not only into several mental health centers and universities in China, but into other countries including Finland, Germany, Brazil and others, where faculty members have built academic and research relationships and presented their work.

The SMHC agreement, said Dr. Ziedonis, is the Department of Psychiatry's first official MOU with a mental health center in China. He said the partnership reflects the strong commitment that the University of Massachusetts has made to defining, promoting, and expanding the university's role in China. The university has several agreements with institutions in China.