



## Victoria physicians sponsor Chinese students

A decades-old interest in China has prompted 2 Canadian physicians to “adopt” 7 high school students from Suzhou, China. Each year since 1992, Drs. Fleming and Aileen McConnell have financially sponsored 1 new Chinese student attending L.B. Pearson United World College of the Pacific in Victoria. For them, sponsorship involves more than financial assistance. They have become surrogate Canadian parents for the visitors, welcoming the students into their home during Christmas and other holidays and meeting their families in China. “They’ve become very much family,” says Dr. Aileen McConnell.

Like any parents, the McConnells, who have no biological children, are proud of their students’ accomplishments. One is completing a PhD in finance at the Wharton School of Business in Pennsylvania, a second is studying economics at Harvard University and a third is studying computer science and mathematics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technol-

ogy (MIT). Another is taking premedicine courses at BC’s Simon Fraser University. “It’s satisfying to see young people seize an opportunity to do things and do them well,” she says.

The sponsorships are a natural fit with the couple’s longtime interest in China. Fleming McConnell, a retired radiologist, is passionate about Chinese history, philosophy and culture. Over the past 20 years he has made about a dozen visits to China, while his wife has visited 7 times. Both have studied in China and speak Mandarin. When the McConnells moved from the Edmonton area to Victoria in 1990, they noted that the local United World College had no students from China. Since Victoria and Suzhou are sister cities, it was decided to select students from there.

The BC college is 1 of 12 around the world that recruits pupils in their second-last year of high school in 80 different countries. The students finish their high school at the college, which is renowned for its high academic standards and commitment to responsibility in social services, and graduate with an international baccalaureate.

“The college has an outstanding reputation,” says Aileen McConnell, a semi-retired internist who also raises sheep and trains border collies. “Stanford, Harvard, MIT, Cambridge, Penn State . . . they all send scouts, and many students go on full or partial scholarships to leading universities in North America and the United Kingdom.”

Although it seemed appropriate for students to come from Suzhou to Victoria, it was difficult to arrange the trips because the Chinese government is reluctant to let high school students travel abroad. After much negotiation through the Canadian and Chinese consulates, 2 prestigious Suzhou high schools were selected to provide students for the Victoria college.

“The students have all responded well to the challenge of Pearson,” Fleming McConnell said this fall, as he prepared to welcome yet another student. — *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*



Drs. Aileen and Fleming McConnell with 2 of their clan, Fang Hua (right) and Xian Xiang, during a visit to Boston, where the women attend university

## Why are physicians avoiding New Brunswick?

New Brunswick needs about 300 additional physicians to bring its physician:patient ratio in line with the national average. The province now has a ratio of about 1:748, compared with the national ratio of 1:541 (*CMAJ* 1999;161[6]:679). For now, however, the New Brunswick Medical Society (NBMS) is concentrating on filling 28

positions, including 13 funded vacancies and 15 new positions proposed in the last provincial budget.

Remuneration is the underlying problem. Salaried NB physicians now earn less than their counterparts in other Atlantic provinces, while their fee-for-service colleagues, who face global and individual caps, are the

second lowest-paid in the country. Only Newfoundland doctors rank behind them. The NBMS says this longstanding inequity has led to higher patient volumes and problems with recruitment and retention that affect the province’s 1146 physicians.

(Continued on page 1230)