

About AA

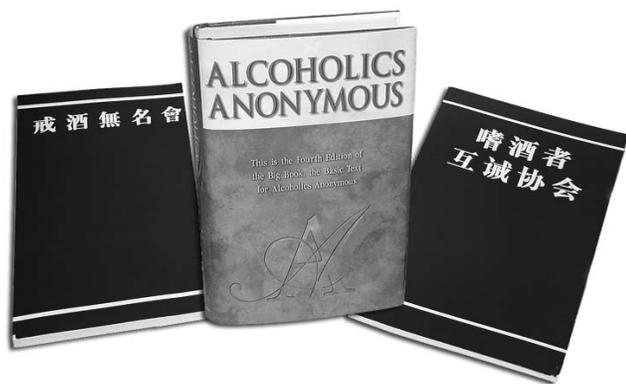
Gratitude for the Professional Community

Chinese Doctors Turn to The Fellowship as a Solution

In Beijing two nonalcoholic doctors — Li Bing, of the Institute of Mental Health, Beijing Medical University; and Guo Song, of the National Drug Dependence Treatment Center, An Ding Hospital — are among a handful of pioneers working tirelessly to make the A.A. program of recovery available to alcoholics in China.

The young English-speaking physicians do not persevere in a vacuum. On an earlier trip to the United States in summer 2000, they, along with two Chinese colleagues — Dr. Guizhen Liu of Shandong and Dr. Wang Qing Mei of Beijing — came as observers to A.A.'s International Convention in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where they were welcomed by their San Francisco hosts, a group of A.A.s who had traveled as a group to China the year before.

The Chinese physicians quickly learned that the growth of the Fellowship in the U.S. could not have been accomplished without the help of A.A.'s concerned nonalcoholic friends. They also came to see that the real impetus for recovery in A.A. eventually must come from the alcoholics themselves. Once back home in Beijing, Dr. Guo Song started the first A.A. meeting in the An Ding Hospital, and several months later Dr. Li Bing followed suit at her treatment facility.



Traditional Chinese and Simplified Chinese Big Books flank our Fourth Edition Alcoholics Anonymous.

Then, last summer, three of A.A.'s public servants — Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee George Vaillant, M.D., professor, Department of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School, senior physician at Brigham and Women's Hospital and a faculty member of Boston Psychiatric Institute; Greg M., A.A.'s General Service Office (G.S.O.) manager; and Eva S., G.S.O. staff member, then on the International assignment — flew to northeast China for a week of activities hosted by Drs. Li Bing and Guo Song.

The travelers' first official stop was at Beijing University Hospital, where, Eva says, "we were told that substance abuse is a significant problem according to some studies, accounting for more than 3.8 percent of the people — which in China's population of more than one-and-a-half billion people amounts to about 57 million substance abusers." Eva notes that "we were given the opportunity to express our gratitude to those who labor in the field of alcoholism, and we presented Dr. Yucan Shen, director of the Institute of Mental Health, with a copy of *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*. In thanking us, she expressed her hope of seeing A.A. emerge as a resource for the newer generations of the medical community in China."

Later, at An Ding Hospital, Dr. Guo Song and members of the hospital staff gave the visitors a tour of the 35-bed facility. George Vaillant, M.D. spoke before a group of young psychiatrists, responding to their many questions about alcoholism and A.A. At the hospital's alcohol-and-drug-dependency treatment center, he interviewed several patients, demonstrating techniques that are used in the U.S. to diagnose alcoholism.

During that time, reports Greg, "Eva and I attended the afternoon A.A. meeting at the hospital. My heart leaped with joy as we sat with nearly a dozen alcoholics, including several in-patients and others sober in A.A., from a few months to a year or more. One of them, Brad, an American working in China, had achieved more than four years of sobriety by going to English-speaking meetings."

The hospital meeting, Greg notes, "was splendid, and the forthright sharing focused on Step One: 'We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.' Several members had copies of the Chinese Big Book (*Alcoholics Anonymous*) and the newly translated pamphlet '44 Questions.' This was a mountaintop experience for me, knowing that our simple program has found its way to these rooms with the help of our friends in medicine, and despite huge challenges." Adds Eva: "It is difficult to describe what it was like being in the presence of the pioneers of A.A. in China, except to say I felt overcome with joy and gratitude."

That evening as the Americans joined Dr. Li Bing at a regular open meeting in the Beijing Medical Center, they were surprised to find that she had invited the local newspapers and television media to be there and to interview Dr. Vaillant after the meeting. "As we entered the room," Eva says, "the first thing that caught our attention were the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions posters. In content they resembled shades on display at so many U.S. meetings — except that these had been beautifully hand-painted in Chinese calligraphy by an A.A. member."

A high point of the trip occurred a couple of days later when the travelers flew north to Changchun and the FAW General Hospital of Julin University. Eva and Greg opened the first A.A.

meeting ever held in Changchun with the A.A. Preamble. Says Greg: "After we briefly shared our personal stories of recovery, one of the patients told how much he wanted to stay sober and said the meeting had been helpful. Afterward we were driven to a lecture hall where Dr. Vaillant talked about A.A. to more than 100 medical personnel, some of whom had traveled more than eight hours to be there."

As a nonalcoholic trustee free of the A.A. member's need to maintain anonymity at the public level, Dr. Vaillant has often served as a link between A.A. and the medical community. In China he reiterated an often-expressed view: "Physicians generally are more knowledgeable about A.A. today and therefore quicker to recommend it to their alcoholic patients. But my own experience tells me that they can't learn about A.A. just by detoxing patients, treating their medical complications and skimming the Big Book and other A.A. literature. They need to go to meetings — to have sort of a microresidency in A.A."

The visiting A.A.s then returned to Beijing University Hospital for additional meetings with hospital doctors and staff. To their astonishment, the press had been asked to attend a premeeting gathering at which the A.A. program was described by a member with 13 months' sobriety. At the meeting itself some patients were present, along with the hospital director and several attending nurses. This was the second A.A. meeting ever held at the facility, and the visitors encouraged members to help each other stay sober through daily contact, and go to meetings as frequently as possible. "My heart was full," says Greg, "as I realized that alcoholics in China have the same chance for sobriety that alcoholics in other countries take for granted."

Professionals Are Pivotal in Steering Patients to A.A.

A.A. membership surveys, conducted triannually since 1968, are random and anonymous, in the spirit of the Fellowship's tradition of anonymity at the public level. But they serve an important purpose: to provide objective information about A.A. for members, the professional community and the general public as part of a continuing effort to help alcoholics.

Questionnaires for the 2001 Membership Survey were distributed by the General Service Office of A.A. in summer 2001 and completed by approximately 7,500 U.S./Canada members ranging in age from teens to octogenarians. Findings reveal that professionals who work with alcoholics play a key role in steering active alcoholics to A.A.

Key findings of the 2001 Membership Survey are available in an updated version of the leaflet "Alcoholics Anonymous Membership Survey" (P-48). Write to the General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

Open House Attracts Professionals Close to Home

In June the General Service Office and the Grapevine, A.A.'s "meeting in print" written by and for A.A. members, cohosted an open house for employees at the Interchurch Center building, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, where the office of both entities are

located. The event marked two events; A.A.'s 67th anniversary and 10 years at the Riverside Drive location.

Said coordinator Susan U., the G.S.O. staff member who also serves on the Cooperation With the Professional Community (C.P.C.) assignment: "We were eager to introduce A.A. to Interchurch Center personnel with the hope of learning how we can cooperate effectively with them to reach the alcoholics in their midst."

Months of planning preceded the daylong celebration. In the morning presentations about A.A.'s history and worldwide scope were given by Elaine McDowell, Ph.D., Class A (nonalcoholic) chair of the General Service Board; Des T., executive editor of the Grapevine; and Greg M., G.S.O.'s general manager. Throughout the afternoon visitors dropped by the G.S.O. and Grapevine offices for informal tours and refreshments. As many as 48 Big Books — each in a different language, from Afrikaans to Vietnamese — were on display for visitors to see.

"Besides providing general information about A.A.," Susan reports, "we made contact with several professionals in the building. Consequently Rick W., on the Public Information desk, discussed the Fellowship on a shortwave program that aired in Africa. And Bill A., on the International assignment, met professionals who travel and want to know about A.A. overseas. Julio E., on the Correctional Facilities desk, connected with two prison ministers and will share information with them." Noting that "success is never measured by mere numbers at a C.P.C. event," Susan concludes, "Sometimes just one person who is reached through C.P.C. can have enormous impact on our effectiveness in carrying the A.A. message to suffering alcoholics."

Trustees to Attend Following Events

September 2002, Recovery Month — Elaine McDowell, Ph.D., chair of A.A.'s General Service Board, will attend a Congressional luncheon, Sept. 5, in Washington, to begin National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Recovery Month. Alcoholics Anonymous is listed as a resource to professionals who are involved with recovery month.

September 9-13, WHO/China Institute of Substance Abuse, Beijing — In the first event of its kind over one hundred medical professionals from the Peoples Republic of China, will gather to hear presentations from professionals in the substance abuse field and A.A., N.A. and Al-Anon. George Vaillant, M.D., Class A trustee, will participate.

September 22-27 World Forum Montreal 2002 — Five Class A (nonalcoholic) trustees on the General Service Board will take part in an international forum at the Palais des Congress de Montreal. Each trustee will give at least two presentations and will rotate participation in four 90-minute sessions on topics such as Alcoholics Anonymous Around the World, How A.A. Cooperates with the Professional Community, A.A. — A Spiritual Program, and How Effective is Alcoholics Anonymous?

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