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## China Through the Eyes of a Pharmacy Student

Jenna Gregg

*Purdue University*, [gregg2@purdue.edu](mailto:gregg2@purdue.edu)

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# PURDUE JOURNAL OF SERVICE-LEARNING AND INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

## China Through the Eyes of a Pharmacy Student

Jenna Gregg, College of Pharmacy

I participated in a study abroad course with other pharmacy and public health students. We toured hospitals and pharmacies to get a real-life perception of China's world of medicine. This once-in-a-lifetime experience opened my eyes to the world of traditional Chinese medicine. From Beijing to Xi'an to Shanghai, medicine is practiced differently—even within the same country.

From the oldest pharmacy in China to the most modern, the lack of regulation was apparent as compared to United States pharmacy practices. Many prescription medications in the United States, including isotretinoin, oral antibiotics, and oral contraceptives, were sold over the counter in China.

I witnessed several differences among hospitals in China, as well as differences compared to U.S. hospitals. One of the main differences was the number of patients per room. In China, rooms held six patients each, whereas in American hospitals there are oftentimes only 1–2 patients per room due to patient privacy issues and infection control policies.

Another difference was the use of Western medicine. In America, we are fairly quick to use available pharmaceuticals. The culture of traditional Chinese medicine is to use natural medicines and nonpharmacologic treatments before advancing to Western medicine. We observed an immense contrast in hospitals while in Shanghai, with the Chinese hospital located across the street from an American hospital. The American hospital was much cleaner and did not try to conserve resources as the Chinese hospital did. The residents of Shanghai described the American hospital as a privilege. It was much more expensive and patients were seen more quickly, unlike the Chinese hospital. There, patients some-

times would wait 8–10 hours before receiving service due to the facility being overcrowded and understaffed.

Touring and visiting places of day-to-day Chinese living, including a village school and low-income hutong villages, showed the impact the Chinese lifestyle has on the way medicine currently is practiced. A hutong is a narrow street that is lined with 1–2 bedroom living quarters and connected by small concrete pathways. Individual houses within the hutong do not have a lavatory, so there is a public restroom for the entire hutong to use. At the village school, we observed and participated in sixth grade learning. The conservative culture was evident there, with the classroom only containing a chalkboard and small, broken desks on a dirty floor. We spent a couple of hours helping teach the English language to the students. And of course, we taught them the “Hail Purdue” song.

I gained a new respect for and understanding of a different medical culture from this experience. I now have a greater appreciation for traditional Chinese medicine and their approach to Western medicine. As a future pharmacist, I found this experience to be eye-opening and I believe it will benefit me when caring for future patients.

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Children at the Chinese village school. Courtesy of Dr. James McGlothlin.