

**Report: ASEPA Epilepsy Syndrome Workshop and
Visiting Professor Initiative
Jiamusi, Heilongjiang Province, China
21-27 August 2014**

ASEPA Epilepsy Syndrome Workshop

This Epilepsy Syndrome workshop was organized jointly by ASEPA and the China Association Against Epilepsy (CAAE), and was held in Jiamusi on 21-22 August 2014. The faculty comprised Professor WeiPing Liao from China; Derrick Chan from Singapore; ChongTin Tan from Malaysia; and Ernie Somerville and John Dunne from Australia. The 2-day scientific program was planned and coordinated by John Dunne and WeiPing Liao, and employed the same framework as previously successful workshops.

This workshop is a continuation of a yearly ASEPA activity in China, where the general epileptology workshop is organized to help strengthen a regional epilepsy centre. CAAE selected the Heilongjiang province as the location for the workshop, as it is a developing area and because Jiamusi is an important medical and neurology training centre, offering MBBS and Neurology training courses at master and doctorate levels – both to national and, since 2005, international students.

Heilongjiang province is located in northeastern China, adjoining Russia. It has a population of approximately 38 million people, mainly Han Chinese together with Manchu, Korean, Mongol and Hui groups. Heilongjiang's agriculture centres on soybeans, corn, wheat, dairy and timber; and industry on petroleum, coal and minerals. The province was originally developed as an industrial centre by the Soviets and Japanese. Since the 1980's outdated industries have been replaced by expanding high-technology industrial development. It is an important gateway to trade with Russia.

Jiamusi is a prefecture-level city in eastern Heilongjiang province, with a population of 2,500,000, of whom 851,000 live in urban districts. The industrial sector in Jiamusi is relatively weak compared with other cities in Heilongjiang such as Harbin. However, Jiamusi University, founded in 1947, is a major national educational centre, and has over 18,000 full-time students.

We visited the Jiamusi Central Hospital, founded in 1950. It is a modern and comprehensive 3,000-bed teaching hospital, serving as a centre for medical education, research and patient care. 550,000 people are seen annually, with 53,000 admissions per year. It has a well developed and expanding neurology department, and in recent years an interest in epilepsy has emerged. Professor J Wang, our host, is head of the Epilepsy Center, that has a purpose-built 9-bed inpatient video-EEG monitoring unit and busy inpatient and outpatient services. During the visit, Dr Wang showed us her ASEPA EEG certificate displayed on the wall of the epilepsy center; she was among the first in China to pass the certification examination. She is a dynamic and very effective advocate for people with epilepsy.

There were ~120 delegates registered for the workshop some of who were from other provinces. Heilongjiang province has approximately 300 neurologists. WeiPing Liao brought several colleagues and students from Guangzhou to assist and act as translators. All slides and educational material were translated into Chinese before the workshop and were provided to the delegates. There was strong support for the workshop by the Neurology department and the local authority, and the Director of the Hospital and the deputy Mayor of Jiamusi hosted us for dinner.

Visiting Professor Initiative

This scheme involves one of the visiting workshop faculty staying on at the host centre for several days as visiting professor, and was tried for the first time in Jiamusi. Ernie Somerville performed this role at the Jiamusi Central Hospital from 25-27 August. Ernie, in conjunction with Dr Wang and her staff, saw patients, advised on patient evaluation and treatment, including video-EEG and MRI, and gave further teaching lectures and tutorials. The benefits of this extension to the workshop included the opportunities for small group and individual interaction, and hands-on teaching with real cases. It also resulted in a greater understanding of the needs of the host institution and country. Hospital staff and students reported that the Visiting Professorship was an invaluable addition to the didactic Workshop. A Visiting Professorship immediately following the Workshop takes advantage of the personal relationship between hosts and visitors developed during the Workshop. This initiative is essentially cost-neutral, since the local organisers cover accommodation expenses for the extra three days and no airfares are required.

We believe that the workshop achieved the objectives of enhancing epilepsy knowledge in the Heilongjiang province of China, and of promoting further development of epilepsy at an important regional and national centre for neurology training. Furthermore, the Visiting Professor initiative was an extremely valuable complement to the Workshop, as reported by Jiamusi staff, providing practical interactions and mentoring in clinical skills and in EEG.

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