



HELPING MEDICAL STUDENTS HOLD ON TO THEIR IDEALS

BY GARY SNYDER

Y.C. Chen, secretary of the J.T. Tai Foundation, with recent Geisel graduate Jo Ling Goh ('14) and current medical student Jidi Gao ('15).

MANY PHYSICIANS AND PHYSICIANS-IN-TRAINING STARTED MEDICAL SCHOOL WANTING NOTHING MORE THAN TO SERVE THOSE MOST VULNERABLE AND IN NEED. But the path to

that goal can be obstructed by the stark reality and stress of repaying the heavy debt incurred during medical school. It's a bit of a paradox: getting the training to serve those in need can end up becoming a barrier to doing so.

"The reality of pursuing medicine as a career in this country is that, as much of a privilege as it can be, the path also involves a substantial financial investment," says Jidi Gao, a fourth-year Geisel student. "It's a difficult proposition for many to justify choosing certain specialties, particularly in primary care, while incurring many hundreds of thousands in debt. It's unfortunate and unfair to the students themselves, but even more so to the patient population we are all training to serve."

"Major scholarship support from individuals and organizations such as the J.T. Tai Foundation alleviates that stress and gives students an opportunity to pursue their true

passion, in whichever specialty it may lie, rather than potentially caving into very real and often overwhelming financial pressures," says Gao, a J.T. Tai Foundation scholarship recipient. "I don't think it's a stretch to say that scholarships from donors positively and directly affect the shaping of the landscape of the medical community, helping grow the much-needed primary care specialties to the benefit of this entire country."

For Gao, a 2011 Dartmouth College graduate, the funding from the J.T. Tai Foundation and other sources helped remove or at least largely negate the financial obstacle to choosing the type of medicine he wants to practice.

"The support allows many students to continue to hold onto the ideals with which we entered medical school. I'm truly grateful just to know deep in my heart that, whatever specialty I decide to enter, it was purely out of passion for the work, and out of the belief that that particular field is where I can personally do my best work, without the decision-making process becoming tainted with fear of future financial strain."

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Gao adds that the support from scholarships also provides him more financial latitude to participate in potentially costly activities during medical school that “vastly enhance my education, including traveling for rotations at distant sites, partaking in education and service trips, and performing unpaid research work.”

At Geisel, 54 percent of medical students receive partial need-based scholarships, and 84 percent rely on loans to fund their education.

“The school is so appreciative of every scholarship gift,” says Gordon “Dino” Koff, associate dean for student affairs and admissions who also oversees financial aid at Geisel. “I see the difference these gifts make every day in the lives of our students and graduates.”

Over nearly two decades, the J.T. Tai Foundation has made medical school more affordable for 155 MD students

at Dartmouth. Since 1996, the foundation has given \$835,000 total to Geisel students.

“Mr. Tai wanted to help medical and other students with the high cost of their education,” says Y.C. Chen, secretary of the J.T. Tai Foundation. “His investment is in the students and helping them to become teachers and doctors. Tuition costs are so high, and this helps relieve some of that burden.”

“These students graduate and serve their communities,” Chen adds. “Some go into practice in underserved communities. That’s very rewarding to see. Mr. Tai would be very pleased.”

Sometimes, scholarship support can be the tipping point that opens the door to medical school.

“The scholarship from the J.T. Tai Foundation changed my life,” says Jo Ling Goh, MD (’14). “It was only possible for me to be in medical school because of these contributions.”



Slava Finnerman