

# Shadowing a Psychiatrist at Guangzhou Hospital: Observing Cultural Differences in China's Mental Healthcare

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## Project

**Country:** China

**Agency:** Guangzhou Overseas Chinese Hospital

**Objectives:** To intern at the psychiatric unit of a Chinese hospital and:

- Shadow mental health and psychiatric practitioners in a different country
- Conduct qualitative interviews with staff about cultural attitudes
- Observe the influence of stigma and other prospective barriers to mental healthcare among Chinese natives, to inform clinical practice with Chinese Americans and healthcare systems in the United States

## Background

**Purpose:** Asian Americans find mental illnesses significantly stigmatizing, often resulting in delaying or denying care<sup>1,2</sup>

- Literature suggest that Asian Americans seek mental health services less than other ethnic groups<sup>3-5</sup>
- Family<sup>6</sup> and community<sup>7</sup> are important values among Chinese individuals
- In general, stigma is a prominent barrier to receiving mental healthcare<sup>8,9</sup>

**Choice:** Selection of Guangzhou internship due to personal research and clinical interests working with Chinese Americans in social work career

## Skills and Outcomes

**Hospital Internship:**

- Adaptation of professional identity
- Communication with staff and patients in Mandarin Chinese
- Assessment skills while observing psych. evals, outpatient consultation sessions and inpatient check-ins

**Academic Research:**

- Conducting a literature review and writing a theory paper for publication
- Synthesis and critical analysis of observational findings using a culturally sensitive framework



## Connections

**Classroom Connections:**

- Psychiatric hospitals in China are greatly influenced by Western practice (i.e. use of U.S. tools such as the PHQ-9 & GAD-7)
- Many areas in China do not have social workers, and there is opportunity for movement towards integrated health systems

**Career Connections:**

- Collectivist values are important to be sensitive to when working with Chinese Americans in practice
- Agencies should work to address disparities in access for clients of different ethnic backgrounds



## Lessons Learned

**Takeaways:** Seeking to understand our clients' cultural foundations help us learn about their lived values

- Family members in China are deeply involved in a patient's mental healthcare, often at great toll and sacrifices
- Stigma is a prominent barrier to seeking care among Chinese families, and this is prevalent in the United States

**Future Directions:** Social workers must continue incorporating cultural sensitivity into all forms of practice

- Clinical: help Chinese Americans navigate dual values, provide support and resources for family members
- Research: investigate concepts of family burden, stigma, barriers to mental healthcare among Chinese groups

## Advice for Students

- **Keep a personal journal or blog when traveling:** Having a space to reflect and process is immensely helpful
- **Practice humility:** The opportunity to shadow at another country's established institution is a huge privilege, and it is important to recognize what we are bringing into someone else's space as a guest
- **Be curious:** Take initiative and seek out as many opportunities as possible to shape your own learning experience

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