



# Alumna viewpoint

## Engaging patients and physicians in China's fight against chronic diseases

PHOTO BY BARBARA TYROLER

With an aging population and the adoption of an increasingly western lifestyle, the burden of chronic diseases in China is on the rise. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the percentage of Chinese people over age 65 will more than double between 2000 and 2030 – from 7 percent to 16 percent. By 2050, one in four people in China will be older than 65.

This demographic shift already is having a huge impact upon the number of people living with chronic diseases, such as hypertension, infectious diseases, cancers, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and diabetes – China already has the largest diabetic population in the world, and it's growing at 16 percent each year.

This burden on the health-care system drives the need for innovative approaches to disease prevention and treatment. Key to both is better education for health professionals and patients.

The health-care industry can help address this need by supporting continuing medical education for professionals at all levels –

education that improves core knowledge in key therapeutic areas, introduces innovative methods for disease prevention and shares research about the newest treatments to enable selection of the most appropriate therapies.

Patients, too, increasingly are looking for ongoing support and information from a variety of sources, including private enterprise, as they take a greater role in managing their own health. Arming them with the knowledge to make smart decisions about care and treatments – for themselves and for their family members – and helping them gain access to services and therapies within their own communities will be essential if China achieves its long-term goals for health.

—Clancey Houston



Clancey Houston, MPH, is managing director of inVentiv Health Communications / China, a multidisciplinary integrated communications group dedicated to improving health through innovation and superior communication programs. For nearly twenty years, she has led integrated multinational teams in building, promoting and protecting brands and businesses in the highly complex and issues-rich markets of Asia Pacific and Africa.

Houston holds a bachelor's degree in Chinese and political science from Middlebury College and a Master of Public Health degree in health policy and management from UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health. She is fluent in Mandarin Chinese.

Read more about the diabetes crisis in China in a recent study by nutrition professors Penny Gordon-Larsen, PhD, and W. R. Kenan Jr. Distinguished Professor Barry Popkin, PhD at [tinyurl.com/nature-diabetes-in-China](http://tinyurl.com/nature-diabetes-in-China). Nutrition faculty members Linda Adair, PhD, Elizabeth Mayer-Davis, PhD, and Shufa Du, PhD, and biostatistics professor Amy Herring, ScD, co-authored the study.