

SRPC's Featured Member - Dr. Xiu-Mei (Sue-May) Zhang Whitehorse, Yukon

Dr. Xiu-Mei (Sue-May) Zhang was born and raised in China. She graduated from the Norman Bethune University of Medical Sciences (Ji Lin University) and worked at an Internal Medicine Department in a general hospital in Beijing. In 1991, Dr. Zhang moved to Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, with her husband Jim. They began their lives in Canada, working as acupuncturists at Dr. Branigan Clinic. During their initial years, they faced tremendous challenges with the immigration department. Thanks to continuous support from the northern communities, they were finally able to become landed immigrants, after an extended 3 year battle.

Dr. Xiu-Mei and her husband Jim have two Yukon-born sons. Initially, they wanted to move to a city with a larger Chinese community but developed strong ties to Whitehorse and other communities that their patients were from. Dr. Xiu-Mei has always wanted to be a doctor. Having completed all her medical schooling in China, she knew a minimum of medical terminology in English. She almost gave up on her dream upon moving to Canada. In 2001, Dr. Xiu-Mei was practicing her English by imitating the broadcast on the radio station. The broadcast was interviewing an international medical graduate (IMG) who worked as a taxi driver for ten years in Edmonton, before completing the requirements to practice medicine in Canada. She remembers the feeling of butterflies in her stomach as she continued listening to the interview and developed a newfound inspiration to continue following her dream and becoming a medical doctor in Canada.

With her family and Physician friends' support, Xiu-Mei passed the LMCC exams of MCCEE, MCCQE1 and MCCQE2. She was issued a limited family medicine license and working under the supervision and mentoring by Dr. Sally MacDonald at Whitehorse Medical Clinic in 2005. Later, she successfully went through the WAAIP's (Western Alliance Assessment for International Physician) IMG assessment program through the University of Calgary's rural medicine program in 2006. Xiu-Mei was practicing Family Medicine while continuing to practice Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) with her husband. By this time, Xiu-Mei's husband, Jim, had developed a large patient-base across many northern communities. Xiu-Mei and Jim frequently travelled around to these remote communities for work. She would practice western medicine, while Jim would practice TCM. During her first locum work at Inuvik, NWT, she met Dr. Braam DeKlerk and Dr. Leah Seaman, who introduced her to SRPC. Xiu-Mei went to her first Rural and Remote Medicine Course (RRMC) in 2011 at Blue Mountain, and immediately fell in love with the SRPC. The courses she took during the RRMC, including the CALS, gave her the necessary knowledge and confidence needed to survive her first experiences of practicing rural medicine, where she was the sole physician at Fort Smith, NWT, a town of 2500 population.

Currently, Dr. Xiu-Mei Zhang works primarily at Pine Medical Center in Whitehorse, where she practices family medicine. She also works at the Kwanlin Dun Health Center, a First Nation's collaborative health

care facility and is the lead physician for the Women's Midlife Health Clinic, a coordinated care approach serving women for their menopause and post-menopause issues, where she works with other physicians, nurse practitioners and pharmacists. Dr. Zhang also provides in-patients care at the Whitehorse General Hospital (WGH) and residents at Long Term Care facilities in Whitehorse. She is an active member of the WGH Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), where she provides Sexual Assault Medical Services and Forensic exams. In March 2020, Dr. Zhang finished working as a visiting physician for the northern community of Old Crow. Old Crow is a fly-in community, in the Yukon, with a population of 250 Gwich'in residents. Throughout her eight years of working in Old Crow, Dr. Zhang has formed deep bonds with all the community members and is grateful for all the traditions, stories, and experiences they shared with her. Xiu-Mei feels the deep connection as Dr. Norman Bethune had brought his western medical knowledge to China when Chinese soldiers are in deep need during the war and after she had studied at the University which was established by Dr. Bethune, she now came to serve his homeland.

Xiu-Mei has gone through several major life challenges, including the sudden loss of her beloved husband. However, she was very thankful for the tremendous love and care from her hometown, Whitehorse, and other rural communities that she and her husband have worked in, including communities in



NWT and Alaska. The support she received showed just how many lives she and her husband have touched since moving to the Yukon. Xiu-Mei has found working closely with First Nations communities to be very rewarding and believes that their culture and tradition,

which is similar to her Chinese heritage, have given her wisdom and resilience to cope with her grief. Besides working as a rural family doctor, Dr. Zhang has turned herself into an active hiker and photographer. She enjoys being able to share her journey through her camera lens. From her experiences working in rural medicine, Xiu-Mei believes that the three pieces of medical equipment she can't live without are an i-STAT, ECG and X-ray medical device when working in remote rural communities. In her opinion, these three devices are necessary when caring for critically ill patients in remote communities.