COMPANIONS IN WOMEN’S HEALTH

EMILY WONG, M.D. ’90, M.H.A. ’02

The story behind this gift begins and ends with family. “My grandmother,” says Emily Wong, M.D. ’90, M.H.A. ’02, “was the one person who believed in me.”

Wong’s grandmother, Madame Liu Bie Ju, lives in Hong Kong, while her granddaughter lives in Seattle. But there are some ties that distance simply cannot sever. Their joint gift, made to establish the Liu Bie Ju Endowed Fellowship for Excellence in Women’s Health at UW Medicine, provides such an example.

Liu Bie Ju grew up in turbulent times in Shanghai. She married young and was forced during wartime to flee to the rural countryside, where health care was often lacking or deficient, leading to tremendous personal suffering and family loss. When part of the family’s textile business was moved to Hong Kong during the Communist Revolution, Liu Bie Ju followed in the family’s industrial tradition, worked in the business, and gained a reputation as a civic leader and philanthropist.

No one in this business-oriented family had ever entered the medical profession, and, two generations later, Emily Wong’s parents doubted she’d succeed. But Liu Bie Ju, who was instrumental in raising her granddaughter, did not. This confidence was well placed. Wong now serves as assistant chair for practice management in the Department of Medicine and as associate medical director for physician services at UW Medical Center. She is also, not coincidentally, a champion of women’s health.

Wong has been strongly influenced by her grandmother’s generous spirit and compassion for the human condition. She became an academic physician because of her commitment to patient care and education, and she has worked diligently to create opportunities to improve health care for women at UW Medicine. In 1998, the University — through the School of Medicine and the School of Nursing — became one of 18 academic medical centers to be designated a National Center of Excellence (CoE) in Women’s Health by the federal Department of Health and Human Services. Wong led the CoE’s efforts, which focused on meeting the needs of underserved women, especially in rural areas. When program funding was phased out, her grandmother wanted to make sure this valuable work would continue.

The Liu Bie Ju Endowed Fellowship for Excellence in Women’s Health will carry on some of the CoE’s work by supporting medical students who participate in the Rural/Underserved Opportunities Program (R/UOP) — a summer program for students who have completed their first year of medical school, and wish to serve and learn in community medical practices in rural and underserved areas in Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho (WWAMI).

Wong designed the endowment to meet a number of her family’s — and UW Medicine’s — priorities, such as providing outreach and medical education to medically underserved areas. The family hopes that by fostering fellowship students’ efforts during the summer, patients and rural communities will continue to benefit even after the students themselves return to medical school.

Wong traveled a great deal with her grandmother while growing up. Today, the two are still close companions, but in a different kind of journey: the creation of a permanent resource for women’s health. It is a journey that holds tremendous promise for medical care in the WWAMI region.

If you would like to learn more about the fellowship, please call Dr. Wong at 206-543-3293. If you would like to make a gift to support the fellowship, please call 206-543-5686.