

Top marks for HSA member

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by DAN KEETON



here are many HSA members who received excellent grades while training for their profession. But how many achieve one of Canadas top academic honours while studying for a new health sciences career?

Di Cindy Wu Laboratory Technologist Surrey Memorial Hospital
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Di Cindy Wu, who works evening and night shifts in the laboratory at Surrey Memorial Hospital, won the Governor Generals award for the highest grade point average achieved in 2003. Its all the more impressive since English is Wus second language, and one she seldom used before her relatively recent migration to this country.

And like all such honours, it was gratifying while potentially being somewhat of a burden.

-I was very happy," Wu said. -You know your hard work is recognized. On the other hand, it constantly reminds me to keep up the good work and always try my best."

So far, she has. Wu has been on the job for one and a half years, and loves it. -I really like my job. Its quite rewarding; you feel very good if you know that you did something right, and helped save a persons life."

Such responsibility does rest on the shoulders of laboratory technologists, who perform a variety of tasks crucial to reaching a medical diagnosis. For Wu, the tasks include chemistry, hematology, transfusion and accessioning.

Chemistry mainly involves blood and urine analysis. Hematology includes tests for blood cell counts and coagulation function, which is crucial in the prevention of clotting and strokes.

-Transfusion involves finding out what blood group you are, if you have any antibodies in your blood, whether there are any special requirements for the product you need," she said.

-Or in trauma cases, where they need a lot of blood quickly, then thats very stressful. You need to work very fast, and without mistakes."

Accessioning coordinates the collection of blood samples by lab assistants, entering the data into the computer system and ensuring that the specimen matches the patient. -Theres a lot of communication and

troubleshooting."

Wu's academic achievement is especially remarkable considering that as late as 1999, she lived in her native China. She was a biology teacher teaching in middle school ... approximately Grades 6 to 10. Like many of her generation, she had been taught English, but seldom used the language in which she is now fluent.


When she and her husband emigrated to Canada, "I thought about other jobs ... some kind of labour, maybe a supermarket or restaurant ... but I didn't think I'd want to do that my whole life. So I thought I should do something that I really like and related to my specialty."

Wu discovered the lab technologist program in a brochure from the BC Institute of Technology. "I found the program interesting, and not too far from what I knew," she said. She was accepted as a high school graduate into the two-and-a-half-year program.

It was anything but a cakewalk. "It was quite shocking. I had eight or nine courses in the first semester. There were so many books, and the courses were all in English. I thought, I really had to study hard to stay in this program."

The second year was easier: only five courses and a somewhat lighter workload. "I liked it and was willing to spend time on the program. And I felt everyone else in the class was studying hard, too."

At present, Wu isn't certain what further goals she has, other than to obtain an advanced training as a registered technologist. Right now, she's enjoying her current job and what she calls its element of mystery.

"It's like a detective job. A patient comes in that you know nothing about, and you do all kinds of tests, take this sample and that sample," she said. "And the doctor puts all the pieces together and figures out what is wrong with that patient. It's great to be able to help." 

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