

EXPLORING AUDIOLOGY IN

SOUTH KOREA

BY LISA HUNTER AND
DORIS GORDON



Hallym University students (left to right)
Min-A Kang and Jessica Yu.

Statue: Ducksun Yoon, MD, Founder of Hallym University (1921-1996). Left to right: Jinsook Kim, PhD, Professor, Hallym University; visitors Doris Gordon, MS, MPH; Lisa Hunter, PhD; Hyo-Jeong Lee, MD, PhD; Woojae Han, PhD, Assistant Professor, Hallym University; and Hyung-Jong Kim, MD, PhD, Chairman, ENT Department, Hallym University Sacred Heart Hospital - Anyang, Korea.

An audiology outreach visit to the Republic of Korea was first proposed in the early part of 2009. The Accreditation Council for Audiology Education (ACAE) received a call from an official representative in charge of educational activities at the South Korean Embassy in Washington, DC, and a meeting was arranged to discuss the prospects of developing a program in audiology in South Korea, similar to those offered in the United States. It was clear from the outset that South Korea viewed the United States as a model for its educational programs in audiology, which already spanned the range from bachelor's, to master's, to PhD degrees. The embassy official noted that the university interested in pursuing this venture was Hallym University, located in the cities of Chuncheon and Seoul.

Within weeks after the embassy visit, Jinsook Kim, PhD, professor of audiology at Hallym University in Chuncheon, approached ACAE about some exciting ideas she and her colleagues were developing for a clinical doctorate modeled after the AuD degree in the United States. Their vision was to develop the capacity and expertise to serve the growing, technologically advanced South Korean population with qualified experts in hearing loss and balance care.

The history of South Korea is notable for its close historical and economic ties to the United States since the 1950s, when the United States helped establish the modern state of South Korea after the Korean War. Most people are aware of the tragic division of Korea between the North and South, which still includes a heavily militarized border and a de-militarized zone. During the subsequent decades, South Korea experienced tremendous economic, political, and military growth, and significantly reduced U.S. dependency. South Korea is now one of four "Asian Tigers," and has the 12th largest economy in the world. In contrast to other countries throughout the globe, South Korea continued to prosper during the worldwide economic recession of the past several years, posting a 7 percent growth in 2010. The South Korean economy is expected to grow annually from



3.9 percent to 4.2 percent between 2011–2030 (Economy of South Korea, Wikipedia).

Goals for the International Outreach

Between 2009–2014, ACAE explored the possibility of assisting Hallym University with its innovative ideas. In January 2014, definitive conversations took place on consulting with school representatives in the fall as they developed student capacity, faculty, and audiology community buy-in for the AuD concept.

Several positive factors encouraged us to put together an American-Korean partnership. Eight PhD faculty out of nine at Hallym were educated in U.S. universities and, together, they successfully launched several programs throughout South Korea at the degree levels cited above. There is a tremendous need for audiologists to serve the burgeoning population in Asia that suffers from hearing loss and balance disorders. In South Korea, with a population of 50.22 million as of 2013 (World Bank), tremendous investments in technology, including advanced Internet capabilities and high levels of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education illustrate that the infrastructure is present to support audiology education and clinical care. Finally, South Korea is a free and democratic society, with educational systems structured in an open and transparent way to promote quality and to measure outcomes.

Hearing loss and deafness in South Korea is the third most common disability in the nation. About 10 percent of the country's population, approximately 4 million people, is assumed to have some degree of hearing loss. Audiology is a fairly new applied science that facilitates interdisciplinary collaboration with other academic areas. It is also a rapidly developing and promising field because of the expansion of newborn hearing screening, the rapid transition to an aging society, and the exposure to loud noise (in Seoul, specifically, with its population of 26 million). All of these circumstances are similar to what is found in the United States and have resulted in a clear need for professional audiology services in Korea.

What We Found: Our 10-Day Visit—September 2014

Before arriving in Seoul, we already knew the faculty were highly educated and familiar with the U.S. education system. Upon arriving, we were greeted warmly by the faculty and the extended audiology family of students, clinical preceptors, industry leaders, speech-language pathologists, and otolaryngologists. South Koreans are famous for their hospitality, and this reputation is well deserved! Everyone we met was incredibly collegial and personable.

Students: The students were given great responsibility to help coordinate the visit and were able to demonstrate their knowledge of the clinical facilities and research projects. These students universally were eager, full of energy, charming, and proficient in English. This was evident in the questions they asked after hearing presentations each of us provided individually, and in our many discussions together.

Clinicians: Over the past 20 years, an impressive array of clinical audiology facilities have developed in

Chuncheon, Seoul, and other cities in the south of the country. These facilities ranged from private practices owned by audiologists, to university clinics, to private otolaryngology clinics, to hospitals and medical centers. There is a close and collaborative relationship between audiology and otolaryngology, with cooperative training developed for students at all these practice settings. There are approximately 125 students in the undergraduate and graduate tracks receiving a bachelor of science (BS), master's (MS), or a doctor of philosophy (PhD) degree. Currently, students receive several clinical opportunities during their educational training and the exposure is commensurate with their experience.

Hallym University and Origins of Audiology in Korea

Just as Dr. Raymond T. Carhart is acknowledged as the Western father of audiology, the Koreans have two good parents who are the pioneers of audiology in Korea. Dr. Junghak Lee is the father and Dr. Jinsook Kim is the mother. In 1994, soon after earning his PhD in audiology at the University of Georgia, Dr. Lee was offered a faculty position as a professor in the medical school by Dr. Ducksun Yoon, founder of Hallym University (1921-1996). Dr. Yoon was revered as a medical doctor and distinguished scholar, and he suffered from a moderate bilateral sensorineural hearing loss for more than 30 years. He received only a small amount of help from the hearing aids he bought at a conventional hearing aid shop, although he owned six large university hospitals in Seoul and its suburban areas. Dr. Yoon was extremely interested in a state-of-the-art audiology clinic because there was no such comprehensive audiology clinic in South Korea at that time. He suggested that Dr. Lee develop an audiology clinic in one of his renowned hospitals. The clinic quickly achieved success in Hangang Sacred Heart Hospital.

In 1996, Dr. Lee proposed to formally establish an audiology academic program for the first time in Korea. Dr. Yoon fully supported Dr. Lee in creating a master's program at the Hallym University of Graduate Studies in Seoul in 1997. Unfortunately, Dr. Yoon was unable to see the fruits of this labor, as he died before the program started. After the success of Dr. Lee's master course



Office of the President, Hallym University, So. Korea—Left to right: Jinsook Kim, PhD, Professor of Audiology; Ro Kunil, PhD, President, Hallym University; visitors from the United States Lisa Hunter, PhD, and Doris Gordon, MS, MPH.

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in audiology and speech-language pathology, Dr. Kim, who received a PhD in audiology from the University of Virginia, and two speech-pathology professors, moved to Chuncheon city in 2001 to establish undergraduate (bachelor's) and graduate courses (master's and PhD) in audiology at the main campus of Hallym University, where the principal academic system was located.

Currently, more than 90 percent of the undergraduate graduates with an audiology major from Hallym University are employed as audiologists in various workplaces located in metropolitan areas in South Korea. In addition, PhD graduates are serving as professors in other universities. Today, there are eight audiology programs at the undergraduate and/or graduate levels across the country.

In South Korea, a student can be certified as an audiologist after completion of undergraduate courses. With a bachelor's degree, a certified audiologist can obtain employment in various institutions, including university hospitals, related manufacturers, private practices, and welfare centers for the disabled. They may also continue their studies at the master's or doctoral level in graduate school. Academically, graduate students can specialize in basic sciences, psychoacoustics, clinical audiology, hearing aids, cochlear implants, audiological rehabilitation, pediatric audiology, geriatric audiology, industrial audiology, and educational audiology. Based on expertise in these areas, the education encompasses research and the entire scope of practice to carry on the critical roles of monitoring, prevention, evaluation, and rehabilitation of hearing loss.

In September 2014, following our in-depth consultation with Hallym University, the school's faculty decided to take a new leap forward to develop a clinical doctoral program modeled after U.S. programs. The goal of the new program is to provide expert services to individuals suffering from hearing loss and balance disorders. The new program is intended to be taught in English so that Koreans and students from other countries of Asia may attend Hallym University, as it serves as a regional hub for audiology.

A Beautiful Country with Healthy Food


South Korea is a very beautiful country surrounded by mountains, forests, and water. The country is 38,691 square miles in size, approximately 20 percent of the size of the state of California or approximately equal to the size of England. South Koreans are known for their fun-loving, generous and extraordinarily hardworking culture. As an example, our day began at 7:30 am and finished at 9:30 pm. Throughout our busy and intensive visit, it was admirable to see the seriousness our colleagues attributed to their work and the consistent striving to

improve themselves. The value they placed on achievement and quality of life was impressive.

We were fortunate enough to participate in intense academic discussions and were able to see historical places, enjoy natural beauty, and sample delicious cuisine. The Koreans eat an extremely healthy diet of fresh vegetables, fish, and meat as staples. We were lucky to enjoy many wonderful Korean meals, tasting 12 different kinds of kimchi (a basic dish of fermented vegetables, which includes napa cabbage and/or daikon and seasonings). We also learned that Koreans forage for mushrooms and other vegetables in their pristine forests. We were treated to a Buddhist monk vegetarian meal one evening, sampling at least 17 courses. Our breakfasts consisted of Korean dim sum, as well as hot noodle bowls (broth with noodles and vegetables). The Asian influence was therapeutic for the body, mind, and soul.

Conclusion

The ACAE-Hallym exchange visit was a most satisfying one for both host and visitors. Our task was to engage in the fact-finding of audiology programs and services in South Korea and to evaluate possibilities for future development. We learned about the significant role the profession plays academically and clinically throughout the country, and about the power and dedication of the faculty, students, administrators, and clinicians to take any steps necessary to improve upon their skills. According to our new colleagues, they wanted to be part of the future of audiology and felt they were taking the appropriate steps. We provided lectures to them in areas of higher education, accreditation, and in specific subject matter such as pediatrics and diagnostic audiology. The faculty and students embraced the visit with eagerness and enthusiasm.

In an age of globalization, which in higher education and health care is the wave of the future, this consultation focused on sharing of knowledge and values that we predict will only build stronger, better outcomes in South Korea and perhaps elsewhere in Asia. 

Lisa L. Hunter, PhD, is the scientific director of audiology at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center in Cincinnati, OH, and she is the chair of ACAE. Doris Gordon MS, MPH, is the executive director of ACAE.

With contributions from Jinsook Kim, PhD, professor, and Woojae Han, PhD, assistant professor, Hallym University, South Korea.