I was fortunate to be able to visit a number of cities in China recently to talk to university academics, educational agencies, health information managers and students about the programs which the University of Sydney offers in health information management and health informatics.

Shanghai was my first stop. It is a busy, bustling city and China’s largest, with an urban population of 9.86 million. It is considered to be China’s major economic, banking and trade city. I spoke with student counsellors and students from two educational agencies, IDP and ACIC (Australian College Information Centre). These educational agencies are officially recognised by the University of Sydney (and other Australian universities) and can act as agents in China for the designated universities. They assist students in applying to study at Australian universities by supplying advice and support regarding applications, visa processing and English language requirements. I outlined the undergraduate and postgraduate programs in health information management and health informatics at the University of Sydney and spoke with a number of students about ‘health information management’ as a career. Shanghai crab was in season and I enjoyed a wonderful dinner with staff from ACIC.

Beijing, the capital of the People’s Republic of China, was my next port of call. Beijing is considered to be the cultural, scientific and educational centre of China. I visited the Peking University Medical Centre hospital where Associate Professor Liu Aimin is Chief Medical Record Administrator. Liu Aimin is also currently the President of the Chinese Medical Record Association. Liu Aimin has had an association with the School of Health Information Management at the University of Sydney since 1984 when Professor Phyllis Watson first invited him to spend some time with us as a visiting academic. I was also pleased to be able to visit Capital University in Beijing and meet with Professor Wang, whose Faculty of Health Sciences offers a program in health information management. This program, which commenced in 2000, is the first health information management program of its kind in China. I spoke with the final year health information management students from Capital University, who were very interested in our programs in Australia. I also visited two educational agencies in Beijing – IDP and the Enrolment Centre of International Education (also know as Beijing Oz). Peking duck is a specialty of Beijing, and again I enjoyed the splendid hospitality of the Chinese.

Shenyang is a city approximately one hour by plane from Beijing. I arrived at the hotel, which is located opposite the central square and contains a large statue of Mao Zedong, around 7pm. The temperature was minus one degree and about 300 people were practising Tai Chi in unison around the statue, to a background of traditional Chinese music – a most amazing sight. Whilst in Shenyang I visited the Chinese Medical University, which has a medical program that specialises in medical informatics from its third year on. The director of the program, Zhao Yuhong, visited Sydney earlier this year to spend some time at the Centre for Health Informatics at the University of New South Wales and the School of Health Information Management at the University of Sydney.

The final city I visited was Guangzhou, which is in the south of China quite close to Hong Kong, with a population of 4.36 million. I presented a paper at the 11th Chinese Medical Record Congress and again visited educational agents. The Congress was hosted by the Guangzhou branch of the Chinese Medical Record Association and was well attended and very interesting. The specialty of Guangzhou is snake and, yes, it tasted delicious.

China is the most populous country in the world with 1.27 billion people at the end of 2001, one fifth of the world’s total. The people are warm and friendly and there is increasing interest in health information management and health informatics education. There are very exciting developments in the health information management profession within China, and interest was expressed in further strengthening the already established links between health information management professionals in Australia and China.