

## Improving Health in Asia: Michael Kron, MD, MS

Michael Kron, MD, MS, a Professor of Medicine in the Biotechnology and Bioengineering Center, was selected for a National Academy of Sciences Jefferson Fellowship last July. He was appointed as a Senior Science Advisor in the United States Department of State in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Office of Economic Policy. Since he started the Fellowship in August, Kron has worked on a variety of initiatives to improve health and well-being for people living in the Asia Pacific region. He serves as a delegate to the Asia Pacific Economic Consortium (APEC) and traveled to Ningbo, China\*in February. (see photo below)



“A very important and complex issue within the APEC Working Group which I serve on is the global dilemma of counterfeit medications and medical devices. A big aspect of the science surrounding this topic is the great need for rapid point of contact tests that can determine if a medication (e.g. anti-malarials) is counterfeit or substandard. A lot of global organizations (World Health Organization, Interpol, etc.) are working to address this serious problem using new technologies. There is a special four day meeting in Qingdao, China that I will be attending next month, and the meeting will have a wide array of United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and other FDA-like agencies who have all agreed the time is now to attempt the purge of counterfeit meds, illegal online pharmacies (most of what they sell is counterfeit) and more,” says Kron.

Kron is also devoting some his efforts to improving mental health for residents in the Asia Pacific region. The World Health Organization defines mental health as “anything that decreases worker productivity and/or decreases a personal sense of well-being is considered a form of mental illness.” This includes everything from the standard psychological diagnoses of schizophrenia and depression to substance abuse, to post traumatic stress in survivors of natural disasters (e.g. the typhoon in the Philippines back in the fall). For the US Department of State, “a pillar of a healthy economy is a healthy workforce,” says Kron. “Staggering numbers have come out of a Harvard-World Economic Forum document that calculated the overall economic impact of mental health disorders in the trillions of dollars globally. Using the same methods, mental health costs to the economy are greater than those of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and cancer combined!” says Kron. He has recently begun working with Dr. Pamela Collins, Director of the Office of Global Mental Health at the National Institutes of Health, on a workshop

and roadmap document for countries to consider innovative measures to deal with the economic impact of mental illness.

He has several smaller projects he's involved in during his Fellowship including helping several Near East countries with medical education infrastructure. He's also applying to be a short term Fellow to work with one of the US embassies overseas on a specialized project. "In the next few months, I will learn if I 'match' to an embassy within the 31 small and large countries that comprise our definition of the 'Asia Pacific'," says Kron.

\*Milwaukee is a sister city to Ningbo ever since Mayor Tom Barrett visited there some years ago and gave their mayor a Harley Davidson leather jacket!