



Address at China's General Practice Conference

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This year marks the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. It is also the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Medical Association's inception and this year has seen the fulfillment of the 12th "Five-Year Plan" of the People's Republic of China. At this important time, we should remember our history, learn from the past and look to the future. In China we are carrying out radical health reforms and, at the same time, making new plans for the next "Five-Year Plan" in relation to health care. During this process, the development of General Practice is receiving more and more attention and is embracing the considerable opportunities available.

Currently, most people in China, from the general public to clinical physicians, do not have a clear understanding of the concept of General Practice. Some perceive the general practitioner (GP) as someone with a low professional skill level while others believe that a GP can treat all kinds of clinical conditions. In reality, a GP works with a large number and variety of patients dealing with a broad spectrum of health issues. GPs are required to make accurate clinical judgments based on basic practical examinations and to recommend appropriate treatments. Likewise patient referral is

also a crucial part of a GP's daily work. To be effective they need a broader medical knowledge of illness and the local disease spectrum than other clinicians. Other health professionals can be specialized whereas a GP needs to have an extensive knowledge base across every branch of medicine.

Furthermore, GPs need to have numerous different competencies. A GP has many responsibilities to their community, such as providing public health services, health education, psychological counseling and family planning amongst others. These tasks require a GP to have good communication and coordination skills. They must have the common touch to be able to communicate with people from varying backgrounds as well as with medical specialists. They need to have the ability to be a team leader within their clinical practice and to also act as community leaders. In addition, from a technological perspective, the rapid development of health information services makes the Chinese GP not only the direct manager of his patients' health records but also their gateway to emerging "Chinese Internet+" health services.

The conditions necessary for the development of general practice in China can be summarized as "the four points of unification". The first is the unification of basic health organizations



and major hospitals. In-depth structural health reform has already begun in China. The implementation of treatment classification is a key point of this health reform. It requires GPs to work across a spectrum of health issues such as taking care of minor ailments of patients, referring patients for specialist treatment in a timely manner and managing acute and chronic diseases. This will also require the GP to act as a bridge within the medical service system between the needs of common people and the existing hospital system. Links between GPs and the existing medical service system must be built up. Strengthening General Practice at the grass roots level is crucial for health reform in China.

In September 2015 10 leading academic proposed an initiative to ask specialists from top tier hospitals to support the development of General Practice. This is exciting news but we still need to engage in fundamental reform of our health system. Once again, I am calling for the establishment of a Department of General Practice in every medical college or to have General Practice medicine categorized as a specialty in each Department of Clinical Medicine. In addition, it is necessary to establish a General Practice department in every tertiary-level hospital and teaching hospital affiliated to a medical college. To reconstruct the medical system, the government should encourage large hospitals, community health service centers and health clinics in towns and adjoining areas to unite to establish training bases for GPs. This will greatly assist the reconstruction of China's medical service system. We hope that the key government administrative departments across health, education, and finance could in the future look to use the development of General Practice as a core index for the assessment of medical colleges and organizations.

The second point of unification is the conversion and coalescing of clinical practice, medical education, and research. General Practice involves exposure to all forms of medical conditions and is directly connected with the delivery of clinical services. At the same time, it is an essential stage in every resident physician's professional training. General Practice is a natural point of coalescence for clinical practice, medical research, and medical education. As Translational Medicine is growing rapidly, General Practice is becoming increasingly important. I hope

all general practitioners can focus their work to learn from international research and make the delivery and execution of general practice an outstanding feature of our country.

The third unification aspect looks to unite prevention and treatment. Rapid economic development leads to changes in the disease spectrum. Both chronic diseases and infectious diseases are increasing threats to health. Traditionally our big hospitals have focused on treatment, spending less time and money on prevention. GPs will play a leading role in health education and the early detection of disease. The GP is the key to implementing preventive health care guidelines. Building a strong base will help to further strengthen the GPs role in the management of chronic disease and infectious disease monitoring. This can be achieved through the establishment of departments of General Practice in big hospitals, using the local Health Alliance organizations to attract talented people for primary health care centers and to establish good evaluation mechanisms that incentivize positive health outcomes.

The fourth point of unification is the coalition of health care provision and societal development. As a "gatekeeper" of health, the GP is the person who can empower people to have access to health care. The global perception is that a good GP often enjoys a high level of prestige in the community and often come to assume a leadership role within communities. Such responsible GPs will not only be health providers, but will also play active roles as advocates and community leaders at the local level. Here GPs can work in tandem with local committees to promote community health initiatives and improve people's day-to-day quality of life. GPs will become an important force that is trusted by the people and relied on by the government to support and care for its people.

However, the successful development of General Practice in China does indeed face major challenges. We need to use the experience of other countries as a reference and move beyond our current situation. The support of related organizations in China is crucial to forging ahead. As the chairman of the Chinese Peasants' and Workers' Democratic Party, I have seen how the General Practice Specially Contracted Talents Training project which was jointly implemented by the



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Chinese Peasants' and Workers' Democratic Party and the governments of Bijie City (Guizhou Province), Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and Ningde City (Fujian Province) have to date recruited 102 excellent people. The second recruitment drive is about to begin. In the future, my party will put additional support in place to implement the Chinese government's General Practice Specially Contracted Talents Training project at the grassroots level, utilizing the full resources of our party. We will fully support the new system to help attract outstanding GPs to the primary health care service system. The Chinese government is itself striving to achieve its target of having two to three GPs per 10,000 people by 2020. Recently the National Health and Family Planning Commission of the PRC began its work on the health reform plan to form part of the 13th Five-Year plan. They are deeply committed to the "Healthy China" concept. The reconstruction of the medical

service system is seen as a priority landmark achievement in reaching the goals of a "Healthy China". In my opinion there is no doubt that the future development of General Practice is secure and that the future status of GPs in China will increase but it will require strenuous efforts to continue the process of thorough on-going health reform. The evolution of the "Healthy China" initiative will be a driving force towards a bright future for General Practice.

Hard-earned success makes the achievement more valued, I firmly believe that the drive across government departments at all levels and the support from other health workers will make General Practice in China a great success for all our citizens.

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