

POLICY REVIEW

Cabinet gives boost to medical training

Greater focus on clinical practice and nursing to plug gaps in healthcare system exposed by pandemic

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The State Council has adopted a host of measures to boost the training of medical workers, with steps to expand enrollment in postgraduate programs and boost the number of nurses at hospitals as the country moves to address weaknesses in the healthcare sector exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Cabinet said after its executive meeting on Wednesday that China's shortage of medical workers, especially in public health, the treatment of severe cases and nursing, was brought to light by the pandemic, and more efforts must be made to reform and innovate the country's medical education system.

In addressing the shortage, the government will refine the structure of talent training and cultivate more medical workers with expertise in both disease prevention and treatment, a statement released after the meeting said.

Medical schools must offer education in general practice to all their students and gradually expand enrollment in free GP programs tailored to provide services at the grassroots level, the Cabinet said.

It added that central finances will continue to support the training of undergraduate students for posts in township clinics in central and western regions.

Enrollment in postgraduate programs in fields including anesthesiology, infectious diseases, severe illnesses and pediatrics will be increased, and vocational training in nursing will be bolstered.

The meeting underlined the need to accelerate the training of top public health talent, with heightened measures to promote cooperation between medical colleges, disease prevention centers and infectious disease hospitals.

"A stark problem we are facing right now is the shortage of nursing talent. Nursing is a key part of healthcare, and the work of nurses requires dedication and hard work," Premier Li Keqiang said at the meeting, adding that the government will make the training of nurses a policy priority.

Li recalled his trip to Jinyintan Hospital in Wuhan, Hubei province, in late January, when the city was the epicenter of the novel coronavirus outbreak and a shortage of nurses was among the most immediate challenges faced by hospitals.

The meeting on Wednesday also highlighted the need to improve the quality of education for medical workers. The government will establish a mechanism to ensure that students in medical majors obtain adequate clinical practice, the statement said.

University-affiliated hospitals must step up clinical teaching so that those pursuing medical majors can obtain more clinical experience as early as possible.

The evaluation of professional titles for medical workers will focus more on clinical practice, and authorities will refine the standard-



LI SHUYUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

ized training mechanism for resident physicians to improve their clinical practice skills.

The Cabinet added that eligible clinicians with undergraduate degrees will be treated the same as those with postgraduate degrees.

In explaining the decisions, the premier said many doctors expend a great deal of energy writing papers, which reduces the time they can spend in clinical practice, adding that clinical medicine is different from other disciplines in that

experience from actual practice and the treatment of cases is crucial.

Guo Dong, a gastrointestinal surgeon at the Affiliated Hospital of Qingdao University in Shandong province, said giving medical students clinical experience in the early stages of their education will allow them to have a better understanding of their future jobs.

"It will shorten the training period of doctors and help them shift focus to accumulating clinical experience," he said, adding that in most hospitals

three years of clinical experience are needed for a physician with a PhD to become an attending doctor.

Guo said he welcomed the Cabinet's decision to put more focus on clinical experience in the evaluation of professional titles for medical workers.

The current evaluation mechanism stipulates that a doctor must write papers that include experimental data from laboratories during applications for more senior titles, meaning surgeons like him had to

bear an extra burden in addition to their routine duties at hospitals.

"Some hospitals are not equipped with good laboratories, which makes conducting experiments very difficult," he said. Guo also said he was barely able to find any time for experiments and writing papers as he performed as many as four operations a day.

"We need a scientific and objective evaluation mechanism of our expertise as doctors, rather than of our capabilities to write research papers," he said.

Policy digest

Counseling for former COVID-19 patients

A plan to help local health authorities provide psychological counseling services to people who have recovered from COVID-19 has been issued by the National Health Commission.

Local authorities should organize teams consisting of social workers, volunteers and therapists to visit such people, find out about their health and financial conditions and help them solve their problems, the plan said.

The authorities should promote knowledge about COVID-19 through local news outlets to reduce discrimination against former patients, the plan, released on Thursday, said.

It asked local health authorities to set up a database that includes such people's medical records, while emphasizing the importance of protecting their privacy.

The plan also suggested mental health hospitals help community health centers offer mental health assessments for patients who have returned home from hospital, based on informed consent and voluntary participation.

Each county or district should have a team that offers psychological counseling to former patients and their family members, according to their wishes, and the team should pay at least one follow-up visit every six months to record their mental health conditions, according to the plan.

The team should pay special attention to people who exhibit mental health problems and provide one-on-one intervention, and promptly transfer those with serious problems or strong suicidal tendencies to hospitals.

The plan also called for local authorities to provide counseling through hotlines or the internet to allow more people to access psychological intervention services.

Reforms to improve business environment

The State Council has detailed multiple reform measures to improve the business environment and invigorate the market.

While China's business environment has seen remarkable progress in recent years, operational barriers still exist, according to a circular released by the Cabinet last week that listed reforms in four areas to spur business vitality.

China will push for the full adoption of online procedures for starting a business in order to reduce the time required for setting up an enterprise to no more than four working days, the circular said.

It also pledged to simplify regulations and approval procedures, while calling for new breakthroughs in the business registration system.

The power of approval for businesses related to five product categories, including steel bars for construction purposes, will be decentralized to provincial-level market regulators.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

WANG QINGYUN

POLICY RESPONSE

Draft regulation on tenancy rights released for public comment

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A number of ministry-level departments, including those responsible for housing, customs and healthcare, have responded recently to matters of public concern.

Rules to protect interests of tenants and landlords

A draft regulation designed to protect the lawful interests of tenants and landlords has been released by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development for public comment.

One of its provisions says the



interior decoration of apartments should meet national standards and not pose a risk to tenants' health.

Landlords should not rent kitchens, bathrooms, balconies or basements for tenants to live in, and landlords should show their ID and real estate ownership certificates to tenants before a lease is signed. Tenants should also show their ID to landlords.

Landlords who collect deposits from tenants should include the amount collected and when it will be returned in contracts, and landlords should not enter a rented apartment without the tenant's consent, the draft says.

Landlords should also take on the responsibility of apartment maintenance unless they have agreed otherwise with tenants.

Tenants should abide by laws and regulations and not damage or dismantle fire safety facilities or make alterations to apartments' load-bearing structures, it says.

Real estate agents should not coax or force tenants into applying for loans to pay rents by offering for loans to pay rents by offering rent discounts or other measures, and they must not include any mention of such loans in lease agreements.

Commercial banks that grant such loans should make sure the length of maturity does not exceed the duration of the lease, the draft regulation says.

Customs maintains guard on frozen food imports

A series of measures to strengthen management of imported frozen food in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic have been taken by the General Administration of Customs.

In a statement issued on Sept 8 the administration said it has notified or held teleconferences with authorities in 105 countries and regions since the pandemic began, asking that they prevent frozen food and its packaging contami-

nated with the novel coronavirus from being exported to China.

The administration has also conducted "remote sample tests" through video links, and had tested samples from 76 food companies in 30 countries and regions by Sept 7, it said.

By the same date, it had halted imports of frozen food from 56 food companies in 19 countries after their staff members were found to have contracted COVID-19, the statement said, adding that 41 of those companies had taken the initiative to suspend food exports to China.

Customs across China had tested more than 500,000 samples of imported frozen food by Sept 7, with the tests covering the food itself, the inner and outer packaging and the interior of containers, the administration said.

In July, six samples collected from the outer packaging and containers of food imported from Ecuador tested positive for the virus.

Plans cover depression, Alzheimer's disease

The National Health Commission has issued plans to help local health authorities improve their services in preventing and treating depression and Alzheimer's disease and carry out pilot programs for their implementation.

The plans said senior high schools and colleges should include screening for depression in students' health checkups and pay special attention to those with "abnormal results".

Such screening — conducted by trained medical or social workers — should also be included in common tests during pregnancy as well as home visits after women give birth.

Elderly people and people under great pressure from work are also key groups for intervention, according to the plans.

Mental health hospitals should support community health centers in providing mental health assess-



ments for the elderly every year and offering counseling for the depressed.

Local authorities should also strengthen public education to help more people learn about depression, and each city should have at least one hotline providing mental health intervention services around the clock.

As for intervention in cases of Alzheimer's disease, the plans said facilities that care for the elderly should conduct regular assessments to detect people with the disease.

Experts from large hospitals should help grassroots health facilities diagnose patients, formulate treatment plans and conduct follow-up visits.