

POLICY REVIEW

Plan looks to expand TCM globally

Cambodian site a testing ground for collaboration

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Dong Fei is more than happy that appointment slots at the nascent traditional Chinese medicine department she works for at a Cambodian hospital are nearly all taken every day. “There were over 390 visits during the first nine days of operations, exceeding the average at local outpatient clinics,” she said.

A doctor from the Xiyuan Hospital at the China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences in Beijing, Dong is one of 12 specialists dispatched to Cambodia as part of China’s first foreign medical aid team specializing in TCM.

She works at the Cambodia-China Friendship Preah Kosamak Hospital, a Chinese-funded hospital that opened on March 21 in Phnom Penh, the Cambodian capital.

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic and limited resources in the city, Dong and her colleagues had to hand-wash their scrubs and sanitize clinic rooms for themselves at first, but it wasn’t long before the department was operating smoothly, and appointment slots started filling up.

“I think we have successfully taken our first step in efforts to bring the benefits of TCM to Cambodia,” she said.

More countries will be able to experience those benefits in the next few years as China plans to boost international exchange and cooperation in TCM, according to a five-year development plan (2021-25) released by the General Office of the State Council, China’s Cabinet, on March 29.

In addition to developing more TCM hospitals and training more practitioners, the plan calls for improving TCM’s ability to tackle infectious diseases, building friendship hospitals and pharmaceutical parks and promoting the registration and use of TCM medications overseas.

Wang Qi, an academician with the Chinese Academy of Engineering and a professor at the Beijing University of Chinese Medicine, said in an article in the People’s Daily, a major official Chinese publication, that five-year blueprints for the TCM sector used to be released by relevant authorities, but this year marks the first time a plan has been published by the State Council, a sign of enhanced support.

In a statement explaining the development plan, the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine said that some in the international community have spoken highly of TCM since the pandemic began.

“However, due to the fundamental differences between the mechanisms and therapies of TCM and those of western medicine, there remain a number of barriers regarding the international promotion of TCM in the future,” the administration said.

Cambodia is an ideal testing ground for models of future collaboration, according to experts.

Xu Fengqin, vice-president of Xiyuan Hospital, arrived in Cambodia in late January to prepare for the inauguration of the new hospital and contribute to the fight against the Omicron outbreak sweeping the country.

“Because there is a large Chinese population in Cambodia, local people are already accustomed to



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TCM and to using TCM medication at home,” she said.

Lianhua Qingwen capsules and Huashi Baidu granules — two TCM medications widely used during the outbreak in China — have also been licensed for use in treating mild infections in Cambodia.

“There was a patient who was extremely anxious because his test results had been positive for a month and a half. I was only able to offer consultation via video link because we lived in different cities,” Xu said. “About a week after I prescribed TCM medication, his results came back negative.”

In addition to COVID-19 treatments, Xu said other TCM services, especially acupuncture, are popular.

“To meet surging demand, we have set up more acupuncture beds in a

vacant room,” she said. “Even so, appointments are often fully booked.”

She added that the Chinese foreign aid team has launched a training program for 100 medical workers to spread awareness of the basic methodology and advantages of TCM.

“We aim to deepen mutual understanding, so that when Chinese doctors encounter a patient beyond our capacity to treat, we can refer them to other doctors, and vice versa,” she said.

Xu said that she hopes Cambodian healthcare workers will be able to undergo systematic TCM training in China and take what they learn home.

According to the TCM administration, China plans to cooperate with countries involved in the Belt

and Road Initiative to establish 30 TCM centers, 50 collaboration centers and a number of TCM manufacturing centers abroad in the next few years.

More TCM professionals will also be dispatched as part of foreign aid groups.

Zhang Boli, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Engineering and honorary president of the Tianjin University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, said during an online interview in March that over 50 seminars have been held regarding the efficacy of TCM in treating COVID-19.

“I have found that overseas experts were very interested in learning how to view the novel coronavirus from the perspective of TCM,” Boli said, adding that Lian-

hua Qingwen capsules were now on sale in at least 20 countries.

“It shows that TCM is gradually being accepted by more and more people,” he said. “The next step is to provide a clear explanation of its efficacy.”

Tong Xiaolin, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Sciences and a top TCM expert, said during an interview with Xinhua News Agency that due to cultural differences, it may be difficult for people in developed countries to fully accept TCM.

He said that expanding the influence of TCM by encouraging more nongovernmental exchanges, promoting it as a supplement to regular medical services in communities, and seeking assistance from overseas Chinese are ways of overcoming this potential issue.

Policy Digest

Banks, insurers urged to meet retirement needs

Banks and insurance companies are being encouraged to develop financial services to help people prepare for their later years, including options such as retirement savings, investment schemes, endowment insurance and pension programs, the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission said.

The maturity dates and restrictive terms for withdrawing money from these financial products should be designed in a way to meet clients’ needs for long-term support during old age, it said in a notice issued earlier this month.

Banks and insurance companies have been asked to observe a client’s suitability requirements, have a full understanding of their retirement plans, financial situation and risk preferences and make reasonable assessments of their needs and risk tolerance before recommending suitable products.

Institutions must accurately, promptly and fully disclose product information and risks according to regulatory provisions, as well as key data including date of maturity, costs, risks and equity.

In addition, promotional materials should introduce products in an explicit and easily understandable way, and must not make misleading statements, the commission said.

Ministry calls for better safety management

Local authorities must enhance safety management of municipal infrastructure including natural gas and heating facilities, water supply and sewer networks, parks and zoos, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development said in a notice.

It asked authorities to implement a national plan to examine natural gas facilities in urban areas and rectify any problems found.

Additionally, authorities must clear clogged sewer pipelines, repair or replace damaged or lost manhole covers and improve maintenance at pump stations, sluice gates and check valves. They are also required to better examine underground infrastructure such as tunnels and subways for potential danger.

Furthermore, the ministry tasked authorities with enhancing safety in urban parks, zoos and botanical gardens to prevent the spread of COVID-19, curb invasive species, prepare for extreme weather and thwart animal escapes.

In terms of heating, authorities must urge service providers to maintain and repair facilities in summer and speed up the renovation of old pipes.

More job opportunities for graduates sought

The General Office of the State Council called on provincial-level governments and ministries to promote the employment of graduates.

In the notice published on the State Council’s website on Friday, the office said authorities should expand the number of jobs available through various channels.

They should help companies offer more jobs for graduates by speeding up the construction of a modern economic system, promoting the transformation and upgrading of the manufacturing industry, bolstering strategic emerging industries and developing a modern service industry.

They should also support micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in employing more graduates through favorable policies, including subsidies, guaranteed loans for startups and tax cuts, the notice said.

The notice further stated that authorities should expand employment at the grassroots level, support self-employment and flexible employment and stabilize the number of jobs in the public sector.

WANG QINGYUN

New technologies help improve efficiency in research laboratories

By WANG XIAOYU

In a laboratory at the China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences, a robotic arm is busy moving vials and petri dishes to measure the amount of serum protein in drug samples — an initial step in evaluating a medication’s efficacy.

“The whole procedure is automatic and very accurate,” said Chen Peng, a laboratory worker at the academy’s Experimental Research Center.

“If we do it manually, we can

probably finish analysis of four to five samples a day, but the robotic arm is able to do as many as 40 samples a day if it works around the clock,” Chen said.

The scene is a far cry from the conventional image associated with traditional Chinese medicine, which usually has people imagining an elderly man with a long beard grinding and brewing herbs in a large clay pot.

“Some of the machines had been sitting idle for years because we did not know how to integrate them efficiently in analysis,” he

said. “But with the introduction of the robotic arm and better knowledge of new technologies, we are now able to put them to use and increase the efficiency and precision of our experiments.”

According to a five-year development plan released by the General Office of the State Council on March 29, China will build a number of national-level TCM research platforms, key clinical research centers and bases, and evidence-based medical centers as part of the measures to boost innovation in the TCM sector.

The China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences will play a central role in the process, the document added.

The laboratory where Chen works offers a peek into an array of modern technologies and tools now used by TCM researchers at the academy.

Due to the complexity of ingredients and the tradition’s reliance on working by hand for centuries, scientific research in the sector had long been considered inefficient.

Yang Hongjun, director of the research center, said its aim is to

be able to offer facilities and equipment to improve precision so that researchers can devote more time to tackling complicated problems.

Zhang Rongzhen, a TCM specialist at a hospital in Wuhu, Anhui province, said during an interview with China Business Journal that TCM scientists should be encouraged to use novel technologies to prove the efficacy of medicines.

She also suggested increasing support for building modern TCM laboratories in the future.