

POLICY REVIEW

Partnerships benefit medical centers

Measures help bring together top-tier, grassroots health institutions

By WANG XIAOYU in Huzhou
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Whenever Zhang accompanied his grandmother to the hospital in the past — the 80-year-old has recently received a coronary stent — he said his greatest concerns were convenience and trustworthy care.

Until recently, the two were contradictory. The clinic in their hometown of Balidian township in Zhejiang province, was small and inefficient, and it was hard to secure appointments at well-known hospitals in Huzhou city, where Balidian is located.

“Just driving to Huzhou and finding a parking lot would take me several hours,” said Zhang, who only gave his surname. “But now, my grandma can obtain consultations from three experienced doctors at the same time near her home.”

The conundrum facing Zhang and his grandmother, who is surnamed Sun, has been solved thanks to a set of healthcare reform measures that included arranging closer partnerships between top-tier hospitals and grassroots medical facilities.

The three doctors that discussed Sun's diagnosis and treatment plans via video link one October morning were from the First People's Hospital of Huzhou. A doctor at the Balidian township health clinic helped set up the meeting and kept the records.

The partnership between the two institutions began in March 2019, when the city-level hospital was designated as the overarching body in charge of guiding the development of a number of lower-level healthcare facilities, including the Balidian clinic.

Xu Wei, deputy head of the Balidian clinic, said that before the partnership, neither patient information nor the availability of appointment slots were shared between urban and rural hospitals.

“Under the partnership, the hospital in Huzhou is required to reserve appointments for serious cases at its rural partners,” he said. “Sun underwent surgery, but she suffers from multiple chronic illnesses and needs to make frequent follow-up visits to the hospital,” he said.

During the online session, Sun received advice from a pharmacist, a nursing care professional and a cardiologist.

Zhang said that “such a scenario was unimaginable a few years ago”.

China's healthcare reforms are poised to benefit an increasing number of patients like Sun, particularly residents of rural and less-developed regions.

A guideline released in early October by the State Council, China's Cabinet, requires local governments to enact medical reforms based on the success of Sanming, a city of about 2.5 million people in Fujian province, which is widely regarded as the trial ground of China's healthcare reform.

Xu Shuqiang, head of the National Health Commission's department of healthcare reform, said during recent briefings that a key lesson from Sanming is the need to consolidate a region's medical resources and rearrange them to improve grassroots medical services.

The new guideline also stressed the need to ramp up the establishment of medical partnerships,



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improve clinical treatment capacity at county-level hospitals, nurture more rural doctors and encourage more people to seek medical help at local healthcare facilities.

After enrolling in the medical partnership program, the Balidian clinic has set up a number of new departments, including ones targeting rehabilitation, skin diseases, dental health, high blood pressure and diabetes, according to Ye Qing, head of the township-level clinic.

An 84-year-old patient surnamed Lu, who had a stroke about a month ago, is now able to receive regular rehabilitation at the clinic's new convalescent rehabilitation ward.

“Our neighbor recommended the place, saying that therapies here are up to standard and affordable,” said Lu's son, who did not offer his name. “In the past, we had to travel to hospitals in the city center, which

was strenuous for my mother and cost a lot more.”

Wang Fei, the doctor attending Sun, was dispatched by the First People's Hospital of Huzhou to help build and manage the new department.

“There is a growing demand for rehabilitation services for the elderly at primary care clinics, particularly as society is aging fast,” he said.

“In Lu's case, she received surgery at the city-level hospital and was discharged after her condition stabilized,” Wang said. “Neither she nor her family have the knowledge or the equipment to aid her recovery, so coming to the clinic was the most convenient solution.”

According to local authorities, Huzhou has set up two city-level partnerships and eight county-level partnerships so far. Last year, more than 90 percent of visits paid to the

city's medical institutions by rural residents occurred through local clinics.

In the meantime, Huzhou has stepped up efforts to nurture and retain grassroots healthcare workers.

Huang Lulu, a former pharmacist from Huzhou's Anji county, is about to become a rural doctor in her hometown of Dazhuyuan village after completing a three-year training program.

“My mother sent me information about the program in 2018,” she said. “I just jumped at the opportunity, because I felt if I could get in and graduate from the program, I could work very near home and help people I have known since childhood.”

Anji rolled out the program in 2018 after identifying a shortage of young rural doctors.

Huang said she first took lessons at the Zhejiang Chinese Medical

University in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, and received training in both traditional Chinese medicine and Western medicine. She then apprenticed at a clinic, and is now preparing to sit for her qualification exams next year.

“Rural doctors must have broad knowledge of common illnesses and be capable of delivering emergency aid,” she said. “The program has taught me a lot and equipped me with a comprehensive set of skills.”

According to local authorities, nearly 50 rural doctors like Huang have gone through the program so far.

Wang Gang, Huzhou vice-mayor, said the city planned to intensify efforts to monitor and manage chronic illnesses in the future, while continuing efforts to direct medical resources to the grassroots level.

Policy Digest

New guideline outlines rights of truck drivers

In concert with 15 other departments, the Ministry of Transport has issued a guideline to solve problems affecting truck drivers and give them a stronger sense of attachment to their occupation.

Addressing a news conference on Nov 3, Vice-Minister of Transport Wang Yang said that the guideline outlines nine specific aspects focused on addressing the complaints of truck drivers, ranging from parking issues and license application difficulties to unreasonable policies.

For example, law enforcement in the transportation sector must now be carried out in a strict, procedural manner to protect personal rights and dignity.

Regulations imposing unreasonable punishments on drivers will be rectified, and local transportation and public security authorities will be required to establish hotlines to deal with complaints from drivers over violations of law enforcement.

According to the guideline, in order to ensure that truck drivers are able to find a place to rest more easily, the number of parking spaces for trucks at expressway service areas will be increased.

Delivery times should also be determined in a reasonable manner to guarantee the right of drivers to rest, the guideline stipulated.

Wang said that the Ministry of Transport will coordinate with relevant departments to ensure that local authorities put into place all the measures contained in the guideline.

Initiative aims to ensure migrant workers get pay

A notice issued by the State Council Leading Group Office of Eradicating Nonpayment of Wages to Rural Migrant Workers stated that a special nationwide campaign was launched on Nov 1 to ensure that migrant workers from rural regions are properly paid before Spring Festival.

The campaign, which will last until next February's festival, will focus on industries and companies that tend to delay the payment of wages, such as the engineering construction sector.

All verified payment-related problems must be solved before Spring Festival, and no mass disruptions or crimes are to be caused by nonpayment.

According to the notice, the office will set up a special group to investigate cases involving large unpaid sums because of their negative social effect.

Employers suspected of refusing to pay on time will be transferred to the courts and held criminally liable.

More free sports parks to be built nationwide

China will build or renovate about 1,000 sports parks around the country by 2025 to ensure the public has access to more free options for exercise to meet the growing demand for physical fitness and a better quality of life.

According to the guideline, jointly issued by the National Development and Reform Commission and six other departments on Oct 29, administrative regions with more than 500,000 permanent residents should have no less than 100,000 square meters of sports parks.

In terms of facilities, the guideline said that parks should have footpaths and a square for use by the middle-aged and elderly, space for teenagers to play football, basketball and volleyball, and playground facilities for younger children.

Noting that construction should not harm the environment, the guideline stated that the parks must be built in open, natural spaces where construction does not lead to the removal of too much greenery, and that no less than 65 percent of the parks should be planted.

Real estate development and excessive commercialization are not permitted in the parks, it stated.

China to develop more national-level, regional facilities by 2025

By WANG XIAOYU

A health official said during a recent news conference that China will build more national-level medical centers and regional health centers by 2025, as part of efforts to achieve the balanced distribution of medical resources across the country.

National-level medical centers have been tasked with playing a key role in tackling complicated diseases, nurturing highly-skilled

medical professionals and advancing fundamental research, according to health authorities.

Regional health centers refer to hospitals located in developed regions that are required to either set up branches in or channel resources to areas with limited access to high-quality healthcare services.

Xu Shuqiang, head of the National Health Commission's department of healthcare reform, said China has so far planned the

establishment of 10 national medical centers and 26 regional health centers.

“These projects will be further expanded nationwide,” he said. “By 2023, regional health centers will cover the entire country, and all construction work will be completed by 2025.”

In order to close the healthcare gap between rural and urban areas, China is now striving to build a stratified healthcare system and boost the capacity of grassroots

healthcare institutions.

Xu added that about 120 provincial-level health centers will be established in the next five years. In the meantime, city-level hospitals will be responsible for taking a leading role in delivering high-quality treatment to local people, he added.

County-level hospitals are urged to strengthen their ability to treat common and acute diseases including chest pain, stroke and severe injuries, as well as to care for criti-

cally ill pregnant women, children and newborns.

“By 2025, we are aiming to build a batch of top county-level hospitals, which are expected to spearhead medical developments locally,” he said.

In addition, Xu said primary health institutions and family doctors will be responsible for meeting the medical demands of local residents, implement public health measures and provide health management services.