

Measures seek to improve healthcare

Policy designed to enhance services, provide better training

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China's latest policy measures to bolster its national healthcare service system will facilitate the offering of high-quality healthcare services at the grassroots level, help solve problems troubling the public most in the sector, and make services more equitable and accessible, officials and analysts said.

A policy document jointly released by the general offices of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council in late March highlighted the need to draw on China's experience in fighting COVID-19 to develop a more systematic, consistent, scientific, balanced and efficient medical system.

Key measures include focusing on rural areas and communities to build teams of healthcare workers, narrowing the talent gap between urban and rural areas and encouraging village doctors to take part in more education programs.

Improvements will also be made in public health, intensive care and geriatrics training, the document said, adding that general practitioners, pediatricians and respiratory physicians will also receive more training.

To strengthen national public healthcare, more work will be done to refine the monitoring and early warning system of diseases to ensure that major epidemics are discovered as early as possible.

An official with the National Health Commission said in a statement after the release of the document that the priorities of the policy measures are to boost healthcare resources by training more talented individuals and enhancing the quality of services at the grassroots level.

They said that bolstering the national healthcare network remains a key task at the rural and community levels, and that the government will devote greater effort to training, as workers are in short supply in these areas.

Bolstering hospitals

The latest policy document also stressed the need to boost the development of county-level hospitals. Steps should be taken to improve their ability to treat and diagnose major diseases, including tumors and cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases.

Another key measure is employing multiple ways of encouraging top-tier hospitals to support the development of county-level hospitals by pairing off through assistance programs.

China has a three-tier system for ranking hospitals, with third-tier hospitals, which have the largest number of beds and provide comprehensive medical services, at the top of the system. Most county-level hospitals are second-tier, while most grassroots-level hospitals are first-tier.

Statistics provided by the commission show that there were 977,790 grassroots healthcare institutions and 36,570 hospitals at the end of 2021. According to the commission, 87.7 percent of county hospitals — or a total of 17,924 institutions — were effectively equivalent to second-tier hospitals or higher by the end of 2022.

Wu Yaobao, president of the People's Hospital in Wulian county, Shandong province, said that county-level hospitals are key providers of healthcare services.

"Only with the development of county-level hospitals can we ensure the general public enjoys fair, reasonably priced and quality medical care," he said.

It is important that county-level hospitals give greater priority to improving the quality of healthcare services, and make parallel efforts to boost their level of management and improve their ability to treat tumors and rare diseases, he said.

However, many county-level hospitals face challenges, including hiring workers, he said, adding that the most significant aspect of the new policy document is that it will deliver more realistic benefits to the general public.



The development of departments for emergency rescue, gynecology, intensive care and infectious diseases at county hospitals will enable the early prevention, discovery and treatment of disease. By enabling patients to receive this kind of healthcare at county hospitals, where they are better covered by health insurance, heavy expenditure can be avoided, which is also helpful in preventing the recurrence of poverty, he added.

The rollout of the policy will encourage the more reasonable allocation of medical resources, as well as the modernization of medical services so that county residents will not have to travel elsewhere to access better healthcare, Wu said.

Family doctor focus

Another key focus of the document is to refine the development of the family doctor system, a key focus of healthcare reform over the past decade.

China will rely on grassroots healthcare institutions as the main means of offering consistent family doctor services in public health, basic care and health management and general practitioners at second- and third-tier hospitals will be encouraged to provide family doctor services at grassroots

institutions, the document stated.

According to the National Health Commission, China can count on 430,000 teams of family doctors to offer basic healthcare services in communities.

Meng Qingyue, executive director with the China Center for Health Development Studies at Peking University, said that family doctors have prioritized service to patients with chronic diseases, pregnant women, children and seniors.

However, he pointed out that there are still problems such as the lack of general practitioners, the lack of coverage in services and the low level of acceptance by the general public of the family doctor system.

The document stresses the need to encourage general practitioners from second and third-tier hospitals to join the ranks of family doctors, a move that will boost the attractiveness of the system, he said.

Measures that encourage families to pay their fees for family doctors based on the number of patients they have, and that offer families a variety of medical insurance policies, will also serve as a pillar for the development of the family doctor system, he added.

Improving consistency

Meng said another highlight of the policy document lies in the fact that it lays out steps to promote stronger integration between healthcare institutions and public health departments.

"An effective response to health-related issues requires the healthcare system to offer the general public consistent, all-round service that covers both treatment and disease prevention," he explained.

Meng added that the fight against COVID-19 has demonstrated the importance of integration between disease prevention and treatment, and more work must be done to raise the level of awareness among health workers in this regard, and to enable greater collaboration between healthcare institutions and public health agencies.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, 19.8 percent of the population was 60 or older at the end of last year, and the population fell for the first time in six decades, heralding a period of negative growth.

To cope with China's increasingly aging society, more work must be done to integrate the healthcare system with the elderly care sector to offer all-round service to senior residents, Meng said.

Policy Digest

Tasks to boost digital development in rural areas

Five central authorities, including the Cyberspace Administration of China, have issued a document laying out 10 key tasks for enhancing digital development in rural areas this year.

The document said the country should use digitization to strengthen the development of rural industries and governance.

It set out several goals to be achieved by the end of this year, including giving 190 million rural residents access to broadband internet and increasing e-commerce sales of agricultural produce to more than 580 billion yuan (\$84.33 billion).

The 10 key tasks were broken down into 26 sub-tasks, which include speeding up improvements to network infrastructure, promoting the digital transformation of the grain industry, using digital technology to ensure national food safety and upgrading e-commerce in rural areas.

Ministries to help SMEs recruit more graduates



The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and the Ministry of Education have decided to launch a campaign to help small- and medium-sized enterprises recruit more college graduates.

In a notice released on Friday, the general offices of the two ministries said the campaign, which lasts 100 days, will be carried out in two phases this year. The first began this month, and the second will take place in October.

Several organizations under the ministries and designated websites will take part in the campaign to host online and real-life recruitment activities.

Local authorities, colleges and universities should invite SMEs to hold on-campus recruitment events and share job postings with graduates, the offices said, requesting that the designated websites set up special channels for the campaign.

Both authorities and websites should strengthen efforts to confirm the authenticity of recruitment information and eliminate false information to protect the rights of college graduates.

The number of graduates is expected to reach 11.58 million this year, a year-on-year increase of 820,000.

Authorities to reduce use of soybean in animal feed

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs has issued a plan to cut the use of soybean meal in livestock and poultry feed.

It said in the plan that it aims to lower the portion of soybean meal in the feed by at least half a percentage point every year for the next three years to less than 13 percent in 2025.

The ministry also aims to enhance the nation's ability to develop and use protein feeds.

It plans to complete a survey and assessment of available protein feed resources in three years, and approve one to two new microbial protein products by 2025.

The ministry also plans to increase the production of high-quality forage grass to 98 million metric tons by 2025.

WANG QINGYUN

New work plan takes additional steps to curb myopia in kids

By XU WEI

A new work plan has been laid out to curb myopia among children, as experts highlighted the need for schools and families to guarantee that students get more exposure to nature to avoid nearsightedness.

The plan marked the third straight year the Ministry of Education has rolled out measures to combat myopia, and includes measures banning students from bringing cellphones and other electronic devices into classrooms and reducing the amount of time students can use devices during the school day.

Local education authorities will receive guidance on ensuring that students get

adequate sleep, and should limit the time students need to finish homework according to their grade level.

Schools, dormitories and libraries must use lighting that does not have a detrimental effect on eyesight, the plan said.

Children must be guaranteed at least two hours of outdoor activities on a daily basis, and they must be fed diets beneficial to their eyesight, it added.

Chinese authorities have scaled up efforts to curb the incidence of myopia among children after the national leadership stressed stronger efforts to protect vision.

Myopia rates among Chinese youth are the highest in the world, according to the

World Health Organization. A survey by the National Health Commission conducted in 2020 found that 14.3 percent of children age 6 or below, 35 percent of primary school students, 71.1 percent of junior high school students and 80.5 percent of senior high school students suffered from myopia.

According to a plan to curb the condition issued by the Ministry of Education in 2021, the percentage of primary school students with myopia should be under 38 percent by 2030, and under 60 and 70 percent for middle school and high school students, respectively.

Chu Zhaohui, a senior researcher at the National Institute of Education Sciences, said the heightened use of electronic devices

among children has been a key factor in the rising incidence of childhood myopia.

One fundamental reason for this is the pressure on children to excel in their academic performance, which forces them to spend too much time reading indoors, he said.

He highlighted the need to reform the evaluation system for students and teachers, and to give schoolchildren more time outdoors, which is key to reducing myopia rates.

"The best solution is to enable children to have greater autonomy over their time, and offer greater exposure to nature with less access to electronic devices," he said.

Li Shiming, an ophthalmologist and

associate professor at Beijing Tongren Hospital, said there has been a rise in the number of children age 4 or 5 who are diagnosed with shortsightedness, and that some of his patients have been as young as 2.

The primary reason that children so young are developing myopia is the rise in early education programs, which has resulted in eye strain.

The number of children with severe myopia, or nearsightedness higher than 600 degrees, has also risen to about 10 percent of his cases, Li said, explaining that this can cause a variety of vision problems.

"Parents play a key role in preventing nearsightedness, and one crucial solution is to give children greater exposure to outdoor activities on the weekends and after school and less indoor training, be that piano or drawing lessons, at too early an age," he said.