

Health Affairs

At the Intersection of Health, Health Care and Policy

Cite this article as:
Jian Rong (Jenny) Xu and Lily Hsu
Working Together To Help People In China Breathe Better
Health Affairs 35, no.6 (2016):1148
doi: 10.1377/hlthaff.2016.0404

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Working Together To Help People In China Breathe Better

BY JIAN RONG (JENNY) XU AND LILY HSU

Chronic respiratory diseases, including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and asthma, represent significant public health threats in China. The third leading cause of death worldwide, COPD affects more than 100 million people in China and is soon expected to become the most prevalent disease in the country, according to the World Health Organization. Moreover, Zhong Nanshan, head of the Guangzhou Institute of Respiratory Diseases, reports that two-thirds of COPD patients are initially diagnosed in late stages of the disease, so prevention and earlier diagnosis and treatment provide an opportunity to better “safeguard public health.”

Asthma is the leading cause of hospitalization among children worldwide and causes major challenges for families because of absenteeism from school and high medical costs. Asthma incidence in China has increased dramatically, with rates up by as much as 40 percent over the past five years. Prevalence in some cities is 11 percent and rising.

Despite the burden of these diseases, standardized plans for prevention, early detection, and treatment are lacking, and awareness of chronic respiratory conditions in China is low—for example, 41 percent of COPD patients don’t know they have the disease.

Recognizing this problem and the opportunities to improve public health, Project HOPE partnered in April 2015 with the pharmaceutical company Astra-Zeneca, government health bureaus,



Dr. Pan Chun Hong from Shanghai TangQiao Community Health Center demonstrates the operation of a lung function screening device on Dr. Jie Lei from the community health center.

and local private companies to form the China Alliance for Respiratory Diseases (CARD) program. Operating in every province in China, CARD aims to improve China’s capacity to cope with chronic respiratory diseases through a comprehensive program that strengthens national care guidelines and policies to conform to international standards, increases access to diagnostics, improves skills of primary health providers, heightens public awareness, and ultimately improves the health of patients with chronic respiratory diseases.

Improving access to equipment for testing lung function and treating respiratory insufficiencies is essential for improving diagnosis and treatment in China. CARD has the ambitious goal of providing lung function devices and nebulizers—which deliver needed med-

ications in an inhaled form—by way of 10,000 “nebulizer rooms” nationwide. The program is more than halfway to that goal and is also increasing the availability of high-quality asthma medications in community health centers.

To strengthen medical care for COPD and asthma, CARD provides respiratory training for health care professionals across China. With curricula designed by China’s leading experts, doctors and nurses participate in internships, workshops, and online trainings that promote early detection and enhance treatment skills for respiratory illness. CARD is also using a social media platform and through it has educated more than thirty million Chinese citizens.

Chronic respiratory diseases in China create a tremendous burden on individuals and the health care system. The CARD program harnesses the collective talents of disease experts, public health officials, media specialists, and Project HOPE’s experience in health education and disease prevention. Through collaboration and strategically coordinated efforts, the public-private alliance is finding sustainable solutions to ease the burden of respiratory disease for people in China. ■

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Project HOPE, an international nonprofit health organization, has published Health Affairs since 1981. Project HOPE brings “health opportunities to people everywhere” through community education, building capacity of health care providers, strengthening health systems, and delivering humanitarian assistance.