

### CHILD HEALTH AND CARE SERVICES IN CHINA

S. Gupta

*"There are no bad flowers. There are only poor gardeners."*

I had been wanting to visit China which had attracted me for a long time. Thus, when an opportunity arose for attending a Conference of IAPTE in Beijing, I accepted.

#### Land and People

China is situated in the eastern part of Asia, and occupies a large area of land—covering desert, plain and hilly terrain. The area is rich in minerals, timber coal, petroleum, natural gas, oil shale and radioactive uranium and thorium.

The population of China is over 1.1 billion. The birth rate has fallen from 37/1000 in 1950 to 21.4/1000 in 1987. The growth rate from 19.00/1000 to 14.39/1000 in the same period. At present the growth rate is roughly zero. The infant mortality rate has come down to roughly 30/1000. The people are health conscious; morning constitutional walks and exercises are common

sight on the roads in the morning. Very few fat youngsters are seen. Most are thin trimmed and athletic.

#### Health Services

China is one of the most populous country in the world, which has crossed the one billion mark. Most young people do not believe in religion. Out of 40 million believers the major groups are Taoism, Muslim, Buddhism and Christianity.

#### Family Planning

Family planning had started in right earnestness. Their growth rate is practically zero. One child per couple is the norm. A couple after getting married have to get the permission of the concerned authority for producing a child. If the first child is normal they cannot have a second child, but if the child is abnormal they can get permission for a second child.

If somebody produces a second child, they may be thrown out of job (if in Government service) and have to look after the child themselves, or a deduction of 5-10% will be made for seven to fourteen years from their monthly wages (the staff and workers and urban residents). Rural couples who have child births beyond the plan pay a fine in some areas and in other areas must sell a large portion of the fixed output quotas to the state as a fine. Normally, the child is looked after by the state for health, education, etc. so producing a second child may mean loss of job and financial burden of looking after the second child, besides, the penalty. Women staff and workers enjoy free medical care. They

*Reprint requests: Dr. Satya Gupta, Consultant Pediatrician, B-100 Swasthya Vihar, New Delhi. 110 092.*

*Received for publication August 27, 1991;  
Accepted October 22, 1991*

are entitled to 90 days maternity leave (105 days in case of twins or if they do heavy work). In some regions, maternity leave is extended to six months on full pay in case of employees with one child. They are also entitled to one child subsidy from the Government for fourteen years. Preferential treatment is given to only children and their families. Sex of the child is not a consideration for a second child.

However, in the country and rural areas, people may have more than one child but then they are agriculturists and do not get state help to the same extent. They do not have pensions. Abortion is legalized, marriage age for girls is 20 and 22 for boys. Divorce rate is very low.

### Primary Health Care

The rural women are served by nearly a million trained personnel, 400,000 barefoot doctors (50% are women) and 700,000 modern midwives. They all belong to a four level women and child care network system—at the production team, brigade co-operative medical station, commune hospital and country maternity centre levels. At each level there are personnel especially responsible for this work. Commune hospitals train and manage the barefoot doctors and midwives. Sterilized cutting of umbilical cord, prenatal and postnatal examinations and follow up checks ups for infants have all but eliminated tetanus and other infectious diseases in newborns.

More and more rural women have their babies in the lying in hospitals. In some places lying in rooms have been set up even in brigade clinics.

### Immunizations

All children receive BCG at birth. Beginning at two months, the child gets vari-

ous immunizations. Booster shots are given until the age of 7 years. All preschool children in the country have a physical examination by the barefoot doctors once a year. A card for each child is kept in the brigade clinic, on which findings are recorded for check-ups, immunization, history of infectious diseases and other ailments and treatment received.

Every time an epidemic disease threatens, the barefoot doctors take preventive action. The barefoot doctors particularly the women, have become the backbone of child health work in the countryside. They visit the homes and fields to spread knowledge on how to keep well and invite mothers and grandmothers to talk on child health. Better care has resulted in stronger physique as shown by improved heights.

In earlier days when infant mortality was high it was thought that having a lot of children would act as an insurance for their security in old age. Now that almost all children live and thrive, the birth rate has steadily declined.

### Family Planning

Late marriages, and birth control methods are encouraged, sterile couples are treated, all contraceptives and related services are free. A team of gynecologist-obstetrician, pediatricians, and several barefoot doctors visit the various communes, examine the married women, and children; thus, health problems are discovered early. The commune, brigade and women's leaders help with publicity and organizations. Efforts are made to combine traditional Chinese Medicine with modern allopathic system and to utilize herbs that grow locally. This has made it possible to treat a large number of patients, improved efficacy of treatment

and kept down costs to the co-operative medical care system. One of the tasks of the barefoot doctors is educating the women on preventive measures. They also provide production team leaders with information on the women's physical condition to guide them in assigning work.

### Medical Services for Children

There are 100 medical colleges and 17 had faculty of pediatrics. The training is based on the Russian pattern where they can qualify as a Pediatrician/General Physician/Surgeon. Provision for PhD and masters degree are also available.

We visited a friendship hospital of 750 beds (Pediatric beds were 57). In this hospital, both traditional and allopathic medicines were being practised, with Russian collaboration. I understand they were involved in research as well, and were doing acupuncture by microwave laser therapy.

There are 30,000 trained pediatricians in China. Almost all the deliveries in urban areas are in hospital, in rural areas 70-80% are hospital based.

The common pattern of morbidity is lower respiratory infections, pneumonia, malignant conditions, auto-immune diseases, lupus, lymphoma, leukemia, neuroblastoma, nephritis syndrome and acute glomerulonephritis. Other infections and infectious conditions are uncommon.

Malnutrition as such was not seen anywhere in the hospital wards or on the streets. Primary Health Care is the priority. Vaccination coverage is about 85-90%.

The rate of female doctors to male doctors is very high. In obstetrics 90%, pediatrics 90%, medicine 70% and in surgery 40% are females. In general 70% of all doctors are females. All nurses are females and half the technicians are females.

### Hospital Services

An OPD card cost roughly 2 US cents, and 2-3 Yuans, i.e., 40-60 cents for professional advice. Hospital stay costs 20 US cents (1 Yuan)/day; there are no private wards. One of the hospital visited was Beijing Children's Hospital. It is a 700 bedded general hospital for children. The hospital has extensive investigative facilities and has practically all pediatric subspecialties. Besides, Departments for Chinese Traditional Medicine and Acupuncture, the hospital caters to the medical needs of the children.

### Teaching

The hospital is affiliated with the second Beijing Medical College. The hospital has 20 professors and associate professors in different fields of pediatrics.

They enrol students for post graduate degrees and about 100 pediatricians from different parts of China come for advanced training every year. The hospital also conducts many short training courses for various pediatric sub-specialties.

### Research

Beijing Institute for Pediatric Research was started in 1979. Since then, research work is closely connected with clinical medicine. Research papers covered a wide variety of topics and are of good quality. Experimental blood level analysis and clinically oriented papers were presented at the Conference.

### Child Health and Care Programme

The Beijing Child Health Care Institute is in close affiliation with the hospitals. It is an independent Centre for guiding the work of child health care of Beijing municipality.

The Child health Service takes care of all the children from birth to 14 years of age in the neighborhood of the hospital.

All the clinical services, research wing and child health Care centres are in the same compound of work in close collaboration.

The hospital has many projects with international organizations.

Finally, it may be interesting to note that the motto of the hospital personnel is unselfishness, hard work, fraternity and solidarity.

### Handicapped Children

I believe, there is a good network of institutions. Since we did not visit any, it is not possible to comment on the quality of training.

### Children's Education

Under 2 years of age, the children go to Nurseries and above 2 years to Kindergartens. Nurseries and Kindergartens in cities are divided in two kinds—day care and boarding. They may be state run or collectively owned or even individually owned. The charges vary from 40 yuans to 70 yuans (5 yuans = \$1). Many are subsidized.

Nurseries and Kindergartens are widespread in the cities and countryside. These give children good care and are equipped to keep children physically fit. They arrange outdoor activities such as hill climbing and swimming. Young women with a good political level and some schooling are chosen as teachers and given a short period of training. They usually supervise about 20 children. They teach them good health habits, singing, dancing, sports and revolutionary ideas as well as the beginning of reading and writing, morning check ups and regular report on possible epidemics help prevent illness. The barefoot doctors regularly visit the Nurseries and Kindergartens to give advice on health work. After this, 6 years education in rural and 9 years in urban areas is compulsory.

We visited a children's school, children looked healthy and full of fun life. They sang for us. I understand school health service and dental service is compulsory.

The population, especially the younger ones are the total responsibility of the state for health, nutrition and education. Besides, gymnastics form a very important part in their daily activity. Fat youngsters were a rarity.

In short the child health care services are well organized and cater to the needs of all children.