

A Winter Session Course on China's Health System Reforms

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(Abstract)

1. Background and Significance

Despite China's rapid economic development since 1978, a health-care crisis has been looming in the country. The outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome, the increasing incidence of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, constant threats of an avian influenza pandemic, and the recent milk scandal serve as reminders of the complex challenges confronting China's deficient and vulnerable health system and the serious economic, social, and global implications of the system's shortfalls. Responding to the mounting demand for policy actions to reform China's broken healthcare system, the State Council Healthcare Reform Leading Group, was formed in September, 2006. After 2 years of numerous studies, the Chinese government put its draft healthcare reform plan (the Plan) on-line on October 14, 2008 to get public comments. The Plan is likely to be implemented from 2009 and on. As Harvard University takes on global health as an important area of strategic and academic development, developing a comprehensive understanding of profound changes in China's healthcare system would not only be extremely interesting to the students at Harvard School of Public Health, but also to those at HMS, KSG and Harvard College.

2. Major Objectives and Expected Products

(1) Develop a comprehensive curriculum for a winter session course on China's health system reforms. The idea of "health system reforms" has captured worldwide attention and imagination in the last 20 years or so, and there is a high demand for expertise in how to improve health systems. This 2.5-3.00 credit course introduces students to the basic methods for conducting health system analysis, sensitizes the participants on the global debate on health system reforms, and helps the students gain some hands-on experiences by interacting with the major stake-holders in China. China represents a fascinating country for conducting the field study on health system reforms, not only because it is the world's largest country and has a wide spectrum of the most complex health and health system issues, but also because serious efforts are underway to reform it. The course shall be consisted of three components: (A) A preparatory seminar series at Harvard; (B) Field study in China (about 3 weeks). We will provide an opportunity for the students to learn about the different levels of China's health system – from the central level to provincial, county, and village level. The field study will end with a policy seminar at the Chinese Ministry of Health, where student representatives will make presentations to China's health policy makers and discuss their diagnosis of China's health system and recommended interventions; (C) Developing research papers. Each student is required to submit a short research paper synthesizing the student's field study experiences. There will be a debriefing meeting/seminar at Harvard for the students to share their experiences and observations with the wider Harvard.

(2) Develop a textbook on China's health system. Cased-based teaching is an effective means to help develop students' problem-solving skills. The HCF grant will also be used to develop teaching cases on design, implementation, and performance evaluation of China's health system reforms.