From: Handley, Gray (NIH/NIAID) [E]
Sent: Mon, 26 Feb 2018 03:53:12 +0000
To: NIAID OGR Ops Team;Bernabe, Gayle (NIH/NIAID) [E];Meegan, James (NIH/NIAID) [E];Western, Karl (NIH/NIAID) [C]
Subject: FW: China Health News from Chinese Media through 02/23/2018

From: Chung, Tina (NIH/FIC) [E]
Sent: Friday, February 23, 2018 8:57 AM
To: FIC IC Reps (b) (6); FIC Scientific Staff (b) (6); Bernabe, Gayle (NIH/NIAID) [E] (b) (6)
Subject: FW: China Health News from Chinese Media through 02/23/2018

FYI, health news from US Embassy/Beijing.

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From: (b) (6)
Sent: Friday, February 23, 2018 3:36 AM
Subject: RE: China Health News from Chinese Media through 02/23/2018

China Health News from Chinese Media
Through February 23, 2018

World Cancer Day February 4
Chinese New Year- February 16

Headlines:

- Chinese scientists find how bats carry viruses without getting sick
- TCM may step in as antibiotics start to fail
- Chinese scientists develop new flu vaccine

- Chinese research advances highlighted in special issue of Human Gene Therapy
- Chinese four-strain flu vaccine to hit market in 2018
- Chinese scientists verify correlation between phages and diabetes
- Official: China's health indicators better than medium-high income countries
- Medicine imports, exports rise as supply-side reform succeeds
- Chinese scientists succeed in world's first stem-cell-regenerated healthy lung tissue
- Elderly care, doctor training among key issues addressed
- Chinese researchers discover new method to end drug addiction
- Targeted therapy fuels China's war on cancer
- National conference on disease prevention and control held in Beijing
- Beijing saved 6.7 billion yuan on medical costs in 2017
- Infectious diseases kill 2,198 in China in December
- Health program lowers smoking rate in pilot areas: commission

Details:

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Chinese scientists find how bats carry viruses without getting sick (Feb 23) Xinhua reports

Chinese scientists have identified the secret of bats that harbor highly pathogenic viruses like Ebola, Marburg and SARS coronavirus but do not show clinical signs of disease. In a paper published on Thursday in the journal Cell Host & Microbe, scientists at the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China find that in bats, an antiviral immune pathway called the STING-interferon pathway is dampened, so bats can maintain just enough defenses against illness without triggering a heightened immune reaction. According to researchers, in humans and other mammals, an immune-based over-response to one of these and other pathogenic viruses can trigger severe illness. By identifying a weakened but not defunct STING pathway in bats, researchers have some new insight into how bats fine-tune antiviral defenses to balance an effective, but not an overt, response against viruses. They hypothesize that this defense strategy evolved as part of three interconnected features of bat biology: they are flying mammals, have a long lifespan, and host a large viral reservoir. These adaptations may have shaped certain antiviral pathways including STING, interferon to make them good viral reservoir hosts and achieve a tolerable balance. Zhou told Xinhua that the study has provided a

possibility that people can learn from bats in combating virus although whether this mechanism can be directly used in humans is still unknown.

TCM may step in as antibiotics start to fail (Feb 23) ECNS reports

China's top experts in traditional Chinese medicine have developed seven treatments that can potentially combat the growing resistance to antibiotics, a global public health threat that could kill 10 million people a year by 2050.The treatments are based on TCM clinical experience and outcomes in curbing antimicrobial resistance, which happens when microorganisms, such as bacteria and viruses, mutate when exposed to antibiotics and antivirals, or AMR. AMR results in medicines becoming ineffective and infections persisting in the body, increasing the risk of spreading to others. To develop the treatments, the China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences set up a process to screen out antibiotic candidates from a pool of TCM drugs used to combat AMR, according to Zhang Boli, the academy's director. However, he said further large-scale clinical trials are needed before TCM antibiotics can be embraced and promoted globally. The World Health Organization has warned that new forms of resistance to antibiotics are emerging and spreading globally, threatening our ability to treat common infectious diseases and resulting in prolonged illness, disabilities and death. Zhang said TCM is promising in addressing the problem Western medicines are failing to combat. "This year, more efforts will be devoted into evaluating and strengthening the TCM filtering platform to screen out more infection-killing TCM remedies. Previous experiences showed some TCM remedies can be used as a substitute for Western antibiotics in the presence of some viral diseases, or lower the viral load. During the latent period, often at the beginning or near the end of treatments, TCM antibiotics can take effect, he said. Led by the National Health and Family Planning Commission, the institute convened early last year a top-level research team of medical experts searching for TCM solutions to anti-microbial resistance, according to Cao Hongxin, former head of science and technology at the State Administration of TCM. Tu Youyou, China's only Nobel laureate in medicine, was on the team. Tu won the Nobel Prize in 2015 for her discovery of artemisinin, an antimalarial treatment derived from sweet wormwood, a TCM herb. Xiao Yonghong, a professor of infectious diseases at Zhejiang University's School of Medicine, said researchers at home and abroad have been studying traditional medicine, including TCM, hoping to find alternatives to antibiotics to reduce bacterial resistance, but no significant progress has been made. "For the present, the available TCM drugs cannot fight bacteria on their own and cannot treat infectious diseases effectively," he said. "They can play an auxiliary role at best." "With further research and development of TCM drugs in the future, TCM drugs that can fight infections effectively may be developed," he said. But related drug resistance cannot be ruled out for TCM. Even if TCM drugs that can replace antibiotics are available in the future, it will be unknown whether they can cause bacterial resistance as antibiotics do until they are used on patients, he said. Sun Jing, an associate professor of drug safety at the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences and Peking Union Medical College, appeared more optimistic. "Some TCM drugs produce effects such as anti-inflammation or anti-infection, and can be used as a substitute for antibiotics," she said. "Some drugs, which mix both TCM elements and chemicals in Western medicine, are also used as antibiotics, but it is not clear whether the TCM elements or chemicals have produced the antibiotic effects," she added. More efforts are needed to encourage research on TCM to help bring down the use of synthetic antibiotics in reducing the effects of drug-resistant bacteria, she said. “I cannot see TCM drugs totally replacing antibiotics in the future. Still, we can expect the use of antibiotics to be reduced with scientific research on potential alternatives," she said. As many physicians know, misuse and overuse of antimicrobials is accelerating AMR development, "so regulating the use of antibiotics both in humans and particularly food animals is always the best effort in battling AMR," Xiao of Zhejiang University's School of Medicine stressed. Worldwide, half the total antibiotics used

each year are in China, with 52 percent of that used for food animals, according to the Review on AMR, a global report commissioned by the British government.

Chinese scientists develop new flu vaccine (Feb 18) ECNS reports

A research group from Wuhan Institute of Virology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, announced that they have developed a new type of flu vaccine using nano-technology. The intranasal nano-vaccine can target broad-spectrum flu viruses and induces robust immune responses, said Cui Zongqiang, leader of the research group. "In our study, an intranasal nanovaccine worked well against infections of H1N1 and H9N2 virus in mice," Cui said. "The results suggest that the 3M2e-rHF nanoparticle is a promising, needle-free, intranasal administered, cross-protective influenza vaccine," he said. Across China, measures have been taken contain the winter flu outbreak. Experts said flu infections this winter are 71 percent above the average for the same period in the previous three years, with child cases rising sharply.Flu outbreaks have been also reported worldwide including the United States, Canada, Britain, Italy, North Africa, Japan, and the Republic of Korea since winter last year.

Chinese research advances highlighted in special issue of Human Gene Therapy (Feb 17) ECNS reports

A special issue of peer-reviewed journal Human Gene Therapy was published on Friday, documenting China's progress, opportunities and challenges in its biomedical research. "This special issue, released coincident with the New Year in China, illustrates the tremendous scientific progress that has been made at certain leading institutions in China working in cell and gene therapy," says its editor-in-chief Terence R. Flotte, professor of University of Massachusetts Medical School. The issue has six research articles and 12 special commentaries and review articles covering the world's first gene therapy product for cancer, the rare diseases registry system, and genomic editing and stem-cell therapy advances. Gendicine, developed by a Shenzhen bio-tech company was approved in 2003 by China Food and Drug Administration (CFDA) as a first-in-class gene therapy product to treat head and neck cancer. It is the first-ever approved gene therapy drug in the world. In a review article, drug evaluation scientists from CFDA discuss the principles on which clinical review of cellular therapy, including CAR-T products in China are based. The special issue shows that China is helping to advance gene and cell therapy and genome editing research by creating novel viral and nonviral vectors for gene delivery and innovative applications of CRISPR technology in a broad range of disease areas. "We hope that these particular focused commentaries can provide a roadmap for gene therapy scientists from other parts of the world to identify important achievements and opportunities for future collaboration," Flotte said. The journal is owned by Mary Ann Liebert, Inc. publishers, a New York-based media company known for establishing authoritative peer-reviewed journals in many promising areas of science and biomedical research.

Chinese four-strain flu vaccine to hit market in 2018 (Feb 17) Xinhua reports

A vaccine to protect people against four subtypes of seasonal influenza viruses is expected to be available on the Chinese market in the second half of 2018, a health official said. Gao Fu, director of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (China CDC), said the upcoming vaccine would be made in China, though other four-strain vaccines have been made available on the European and American markets. There are four common subtypes of seasonal flu viruses: H1N1 and H3N2 of Influenza A, and Victoria and Yamagata lineages of Influenza B. A four-strain vaccine protects against all four and is more effective. But no vaccine can provide a full guarantee; Gao was quoted as saying by the Health News, a newspaper of

the National Health and Family Planning Commission. However, taking a shot, which costs a few dozen yuan, makes more economic senses than getting sick. The medical bill of a hospitalized elderly flu patient fluctuates around 14,000 yuan (about 2,187 U.S. dollars) on average, the paper said. It quoted China CDC sources as saying that less than 2 percent of the population is vaccinated against the seasonal flu. The World Health Organization says seasonal flu is an acute respiratory infection caused by influenza viruses which circulate in all parts of the world. Annual epidemics of influenza are estimated to result in 3 to 5 million cases of severe illness and 290,000 to 650,000 deaths worldwide. This winter, north China regions have been battling a surge of flu infections. Child cases reportedly rose sharply, leading to crowded hospitals and limited supplies of medicine.

Chinese scientists verify correlation between phages and diabetes (Feb 14) ECNS reports

Chinese scientists have verified the correlation between gut bacteriophage and Type 2 Diabetes (T2D) for the first time, according to a paper recently published in the academic journal Microbiome. As a kind of virus, bacteriophages are common and diverse in the biosphere. They infect and replicate within bacteria, whose relation with the latter is normally seen as like hunter and the hunted. An enormous number and variety of phages exist in the human gut. They play an important role in shaping the structure of the bacterial community in the gut, which is related to many complex human diseases. However, although alterations in the gut bacterial community have long been associated with T2D, the role of gut phages has long been neglected. To fill the gap, scientists from the Center for Synthetic Biology Engineering Research (CSynBER), affiliated with the Shenzhen Institutes of Advanced Technology (SIAT), cataloged gut phages and conducted comparative analysis, based on the genetic sequencing data of fecal samples collected from both T2D patients and normal adults. "Interestingly, we observed a significant increase in the number of gut phages in the T2D group," said Ma Yingfei, researcher with CSynBER and the first author of the paper. "After analyzing the genome sequence of the phages, or phageome in short, we found that phages carry a lot of functional genes, which help bacteria to better adapt to the gut ecosystem," Ma said. "As the first study to identify a T2D-specific gut phageome, it indicates that gut phages to some extent are 'good friends' of bacteria, rather than 'predators' of them, as people normally imagined," Ma said. "Hosts, phages and bacteria affect each other in pairs, which contribute to the alterations in the human body, such as the occurrence of diseases." The study will help researchers synthesize or transform gut phages, which might be used to prevent or treat certain diseases by intervening in gut bacteria in the future.

Official: China's health indicators better than medium-high income countries (Feb 12) NHFPC

CGTN- Chinese people now have longer life expectancy and lower maternal and infant mortality rates. China's top health authority says these indicators are better than what's recorded in medium-high income countries, thanks to the nation's ongoing medical reform. On the State Council's Information Office briefing on February 2, the top health authority says people in China now have more doctors and more hospital beds, and pay less for healthcare, as the result of the reform of public hospitals. Wang Hesheng, director of the medical reform office under the State Council, says "every 1,000 people had over two doctors in 2016, up 28 percent compared with 2010. They have more than five beds, up 50 percent from 2010. The numbers increased last year. Doctors and beds are more efficiently used." China now has slightly fewer public hospitals than private ones, but the public ones receive the majority of patients. Since 2017, all public hospitals stopped making profit through medicine markups, but only rely on service fees

and government funds. Individuals' share among the country's total health spending has dropped to 28.8 percent. Over the last three years, people spent less time waiting to see doctors - a decrease of about 10 minutes, or even one hour in some hospitals. Authorities say China's medical reform has helped increase the level of its healthcare services. “China’s major health indicators are higher than medium-high income countries,” Wang said. People's life expectancy increased to 76.5 years old, from 74.38 in 2010. Maternal mortality dropped from 30 per 100 thousand to 20, while infant mortality dropped to 6.8 per thousand from 13.1 per thousand in 2010. “We spent comparatively less and achieved comparatively better results," said Wang. China's medical reform covers many aspects -- from building a hierarchical medical system, to the management of hospitals and from medical insurance to drug supply and overall supervision. It ultimately aims to provide a medical service that's safe and convenient that people can actually feel.

Medicine imports, exports rise as supply-side reform succeeds (Feb.9) NHFPC

China Daily- Leading Chinese medicine and health products makers are keeping a foothold in developed countries as they foresee sustainable growth momentum in mature markets. Last year, the total value of medicines and health products exported from China reached $60.7 billion, up 9.44 percent year-on-year, according to a report released this week by the China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Medicines and Health Products (CCCMHPIE). The growth rate was the highest in the past five years, reversing the declining trend in 2016. Of the total, exports of Western medicines reached $35.46 billion, jumping 12.62 percent year-on-year. "Supply-side reform is showing results, as underdeveloped enterprises are gradually withdrawing from the market and superior companies are standing out, thanks to their high-quality products," said Meng Dongping, deputy director of CCCMHPIE. In 2017, China exported traditional Chinese medicines valued at $3.64 billion, up 2.07 percent over the previous year. The export of plant extracts reached $2.01 billion, increasing 4.33 percent year-on-year, and the export of Chinese patent medicines reached $250 million, climbing 11.03 percent. The export of Chinese medical services is also steadily increasing. Currently, there are about 2,000 traditional Chinese medicine clinicians working abroad every year, accounting for 60 percent of the country's total expatriate doctors. "More than 60 agencies have launched hospitals, healthcare clinics specializing in traditional Chinese medicine, and Chinese medicine research centers in over 20 countries and regions, driven by an increasingly strengthening demand for a healthy and high-quality life," Meng said. The value of medicines and health products imported to China reached $55.88 billion last year, jumping 16.34 percent year-on-year. Tongrentang, a renowned traditional Chinese medicine pharmaceuticals provider, is accelerating its overseas expansion. By the end of last year, it had 140 outlets in 27 countries, including stores, traditional medicine clinics and healthcare centers. In December, the brand launched its first store in Geneva, Switzerland. "In the future, we plan to continue strengthening our investments abroad, including setting up traditional Chinese medicine centers in Kazakhstan and Australia," said Du Xin, deputy director of external management at Tongrentang. "We also plan to establish local factories and plant traditional Chinese medicine materials locally in countries with suitable conditions, forging a renowned Chinese medicines healthcare group that covers the whole supply chain," she said.

Chinese scientists succeed in world's first stem-cell-regenerated healthy lung tissue (Feb 9) NHFPC

China Daily- Chinese researchers have regenerated human lung tissue in a patient using that patient's own stem cells, the first time that has been achieved worldwide, said Zuo Wei, lead researcher of the team from the School of Medicine of Tongji University in Shanghai. After

obtaining dozens of stem cells by brushing a patient's lungs, researchers let the cells multiply into the tens of millions in a lab, then transplanted them into the damaged part of the patient's lungs. After three to six months, the stem cells formed new lung structures, repairing the damaged tissues. "The research signifies that the revival of human organs has stepped out of the lab and into clinical application," said Zhang Jun, Party chief of the school. A paper about their study was published on the Protein& Cell website, a Beijing-based international journal, on Jan 17. Once lung tissues are damaged and develop fibrosis - excessive growth of connective tissue - the disease often continues and cannot be reversed. Traditional medicines only slow down the process of fibrosis, doctors said. However, stem cells have the ability to regenerate and repair tissue, Zuo said.In lab experiments, the lungs of mice with fibrosis in their organs became "very healthy" three weeks later. More than 80 patients have been involved in the clinical experiments since April 2016, and all of them showed progress in indicators such as lung capacity and walking distance, Zuo said. Not all damaged tissue can be replaced by transplanted stem cells, he said, but improvement is visible for everyone to see. Such transplants are not suitable for all kinds of lung diseases. "It will mainly work for lung diseases caused by damaged tissues, such as bronchiectasis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and interstitial lung disease. Lung cancer is not included," Zuo said. Dai Xiaotian, a doctor from the respiration department of the First Hospital affiliated to the Army Medical University in Chongqing, who was responsible for the clinical experiments in the research, said more patients will be recruited this year and the patients will all undergo long-term observation. Research this year will also focus on whether such transplants will work for patients with other diseases, such as of the kidneys and uterus.

Elderly care, doctor training among key issues addressed (Feb 6) NHFPC

China Daily- During the past week, a number of ministries, including the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the National Health and Family Planning Commission, have answered concerns from the public and introduced policies on a wide variety of issues. These include training for general practitioners and quality improvement. Elderly care services have seen “notable progress” after a nationwide program in 2017 during which more than 40,000 nursing homes were requested to “make improvements”, the minister of civil affairs said. Huang Shuxian, minister of civil affairs, said at a news conference held by the State Council Information Office on Feb 1 that several moves, including further opening up of the elderly care market to private capital, have also contributed to the progress. He said these moves will be continued to meet the needs and demands from elderly citizens. Statistics from the ministry show the number of private nursing homes in China saw a year-on-year increase of 7.8 percent, and elderly care facilities based in residential communities increased by 41.3 percent. Gao Xiaobing, vice-minister of civil affairs, said inspections in 2017 found and rectified almost 200,000 issues in nursing homes nationwide and the effect was obvious, with accidents dropping by almost a quarter in 2017. To further improve the quality of workers engaged in the industry, Gao called for a pay raise and more respect for the profession. China aims to train 500,000 more general practitioners by 2030, a senior official said on Jan 25. At present, China has 209,000 general practitioners, but aims to enable every 10,000 residents to have access to five general practitioners by 2030, said Zeng Yixin, deputy head of the National Health and Family Planning Commission, at a news conference held by the State Council’s Information Office. According to a regulation released by the State Council on Jan 31, between two and three qualified general practitioners should be available for every 10,000 people in China by 2020, and the number will increase to five by 2030. Zeng said that key reforms would be carried out, including increasing salaries and the social status for general practitioners and making the job a more attractive career. “As general practitioners usually offer services in local communities, villages and towns, they are more familiar with local people’s living habits and health conditions than hospitals in cities,” Zeng said.

"Therefore, general practitioners play a crucial role in local disease prevention and healthcare, and ease the huge workload of big public hospitals." In 2015, there were 189,000 general practitioners in China, accounting for only 6.2 percent of all doctors, with one general practitioner for every 10,000 citizens, according to the commission.

Chinese researchers discover new method to end drug addiction (Feb 6) NHFPC

Global Times- Chinese scientists have recently found a possible new method to limit or end drug addiction. The study was published in BMC Biology after five years of research by a team headed by Professor Zheng Ping from the School of Basic Medical Sciences and Institutes of Brain Science at Shanghai's Fudan University, the China News Service reported on Feb 5. While there are many ways to effectively detoxify drug addicts, when they encounter environmental conditions, their addiction memory is easily activated, which could cause re-addiction, the team said. "More than 95 percent of drug users, after detoxification, would get re-addicted," Xia Yu, a Beijing-based psychologist who specializes in drug rehabilitation, told the Global Times. The re-addiction could be affected by environmental conditions and personal psychology, which work together to trigger re-addiction, Xia said. The research team put morphine-addicted mice in two boxes under different conditions, and would rapidly withdraw the morphine from the mice in one box, so the mice would display withdrawal symptoms, and would therefore link their state of withdrawal to the environment they were in, according to the report on the website of Fudan University. When placing the mice in a certain environment, the environmental conditions could activate their drug withdrawal memory, so the mice would try to "escape" the environment, the report said. The study found a neuromechanism on activating drug withdrawal memory on changing the environment, and interfering with the mechanism could reduce re-addiction caused by environmental factors. "However, the experiments could have a good effect, but there is no guarantee they could work well in the real world, as drug withdrawal is a comprehensive and complex process," Xia said. China has been exploring ways to contain drug addiction in recent years. The Rehabilitation Management Bureau of East China's Zhejiang Province announced that it has tested VR treatment on drug addicts 1,008 times. The bureau said the results have been encouraging, as the VR treatment has been "largely effective" in treating 98.1 percent of the medium-level methamphetamine addicts, and 67.3 percent of severe methamphetamine addicts also showed some improvement, news portal thepaper.cn reported in August 2017. There were about 2.51 million drug users in the country in 2016, an increase of 6.8 percent from the previous year, a report released by the National Narcotics Control Commission in March 2017 said, according to a report from the Xinhua News Agency in March 2017.

Targeted therapy fuels China's war on cancer (Feb 5) NHFPC

Xinhua- Drops of blood, tubes for assay and a few days of waiting: a tailored prescription for cancer is only a genetic test away. As World Cancer Day draws near, targeted cancer therapy is helping with China's war on cancer. "Thanks to targeted therapeutic medicines, the median survival time of Chinese terminal lung cancer patients has been extended from one year to three years," said Zhou Caicun, a leading oncologist at Shanghai Pulmonary Hospital. In targeted therapies, cancer patients are categorized into various gene mutations through testing, and oral medicines targeting each mutation will be prescribed accordingly. "This personalized approach proves much more effective than the previous 'one-size-fits-all' treatment," Zhou said. Chemotherapy, the traditional first line cancer treatment, has been infamous for its adverse effects such as hair loss and nausea. Whereas targeted therapeutic drugs bring onslaught to cancer cells with much less collateral damage to healthy ones and therefore inflict less pain. The hospital where Zhou works received 14,000 cancer patients last year, 40 percent of whom

adopted targeted therapies. Currently, most tertiary referral hospitals in China can offer such services.China has long been mired in the fight against cancer. A report published by the National Cancer Center in 2017 showed that China has nearly 40 percent of the world's cancer population, with 10,000 cancer patients newly added per day. In 2015, Chinese cancer patients' five-year survival rate was only 36.9 percent, about half that of the United States. China's blueprint for health care development "Healthy China 2030" aims to raise the five-year survival rate by 15 percentage points by 2030. Ever since 2005 when targeted therapeutic drugs made the first foray into the Chinese market, the rate for Chinese terminal lung cancer patients alone has been raised from 8 percent to 18 percent. "Despite an early entry, it was only recently that targeted therapies have become widely accepted by Chinese," said Gu Yutong, a pulmonologist in the Xiamen branch of the Zhongshan Hospital affiliated to Fudan University. For some time, this approach was costly. The monthly expense of Iressa, Tarceva and Conmana, three most frequently prescribed drugs for EGFR mutations, ranged from around 2,000 to 3,000 U.S. dollars. "Some desperate patients even turned to online overseas purchase for bargains, but they often were at the mercy of unqualified middlemen and ill-qualified drugs," Gu said. China's national medicare, however, began to cover 16 brands of targeted therapeutic drugs last year and their prices dropped 44 percent on average. Some drugs are even cheaper than chemotherapy. As the market expands, home-grown medical enterprises are keen to make technological breakthroughs. Betta Pharmaceuticals based in the eastern city of Hangzhou has launched a self-developed targeted therapeutic drug, making China the world's third country to possess such a capability. Also, Shenzhen-based BGI, China's top gene-sequencing provider, is developing the core technologies for next-generation gene sequencing, the well-recognized future for genetic testing. Zheng Limou, who spent some 20 years in the United States for biomedical research and business, returned home in 2008 to set up a medical company. Now, the PCR assay for genetic testing his company offers boasts 70 percent of market share in China. "I saw the potential of targeted therapy in China. And more importantly, I believe it is the future for cancer treatment," Zheng said.

National conference on disease prevention and control held in Beijing (Feb. 3) NHFPC

A national conference on disease prevention and control was held in Beijing on Feb 2 and 3. Wang Guoqiang, vice-minister of the National Health and Family Planning Commission and director of the State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine, delivered a keynote speech at the conference. It was pointed out at the meeting that since 2017, the prevention and control of major diseases has been remarkably successful, and has made positive contributions to the construction of a healthy China. The conference emphasized that it is necessary to gradually control and eliminate a number of major diseases, and strive to enhance people's well-being. The conference required that the disease control system should be improved in 2018, taking reform and innovation as the driving force. Measures for controlling AIDS, tuberculosis, hepatitis C, schistosomiasis and malaria and other endemic diseases should be implemented. A comprehensive prevention and control strategy for chronic diseases should be carried out. A steady advancement of mental health work and strengthening of monitoring and evaluation of health hazards are also necessary.

Beijing saved 6.7 billion yuan on medical costs in 2017 (Feb 1) NHFPC

The Beijing Municipal Commission of Health and Family Planning said on Jan. 28 that Beijing saved about 6.7 billion yuan ($1.06 billion) on medical expenses since the separation of clinic from pharmacy in April 2017. As hierarchical medical care advances, the outpatient visits in large hospitals have decreased by over 10 percent, and 20 percent less patients are seeking appointments with experts. In the meantime, the outpatient visits have increased by 16 percent in community hospitals. The recent report on the work of the municipal government highlighted

the establishment of hierarchical medical system as this year's primary task. Each district will build a compact medical treatment unit that strengthens primary medical care. Meanwhile, the reservation service will be improved to facilitate patients and crack down on scalpers. The Beijing Municipal government has also announced that, by 2020, it will provide at least three general medical practitioners and five rehabilitation nursing beds for every 10,000 residents, and help to raise the average life expectancy to 82.4 years old. By the end of 2017, a total of 251 community medical centers, or 75 percent of the total, had changed the payment method to paying after diagnosis and treatment, instead of paying upfront. Since April 2017, more than 3,700 hospitals have eliminated the margins in sales on medication, according to the commission. The separation of clinic from pharmacy has propelled the establishment of hierarchical medical care, rendering 12 percent and 3 percent less outpatient/emergency visits to tertiary and secondary hospitals respectively, as well as 16 percent and 25 percent more visits to primary hospitals and community healthcare institutions respectively. The number of outpatient and emergency visits to medical experts has also decreased, making it easier for patients with real needs to make such appointments. From Jan. 1, the city merged urban and rural medical insurance policies to become an integrated insurance policy for both urban and rural residents in Beijing. This expanded the number of medical institutions under insurance coverage to over 3,000. The hospital hierarchy is also helped by the new reimbursement system, which provides higher coverage for primary hospitals and below (55 percent) and lower coverage for secondary hospitals and above (50 percent). In addition, the new system standardized the insured categories of medication, medical service and medical facility for all the urban and rural residents, and expanded the types of medicine under coverage from 2,510 to more than 3,000.

Infectious diseases kill 2,198 in China in December (Jan 29) NHFPC

Xinhua- A total of 2,198 people died as a result of infectious diseases on the Chinese mainland in December 2017, official data showed. According to the National Health and Family Planning Commission, there were 699,850 cases of infectious diseases reported on the mainland in December. One person died from plague while no cases of cholera were reported in December. Plague and cholera are classified as Class A infectious diseases, the most serious classification on China's Law on the Prevention and Treatment of Infectious Diseases.@ A total of 294,397 cases were classified as Class B infectious diseases, resulting in 2,187 deaths. Viral hepatitis, tuberculosis, syphilis, gonorrhoea as well as scarlet fever accounted for 93 percent of these cases. Category C diseases caused 10 deaths in December. Infectious diarrhea, influenza, foot and mouth disease were the most prevalent in this category, accounting for 93 percent of cases.

Health program lowers smoking rate in pilot areas: commission (Jan 25) NHFPC

Xinhua- About 21.69 percent of people age 15 or above smoke in a second group of pilot counties and districts for health promotion in China, lower than the national average, the National Health and Family Planning Commission said on Jan 24. The health literacy rate -- an indicator of citizens' health knowledge, skills, and healthy lifestyles -- is 19.57 percent in these areas, higher than the national average of 11.58 percent, Song Shuli, spokesperson for the commission, said at a press conference. China has set up pilot programs in 399 counties and districts since 2014, divided into three groups. In 2018, the commission will expand the program nationwide, Song said. The pilot program promotes the construction of health venues, health education and spreading health knowledge, such as pre-natal classes and free physical check-ups for students.