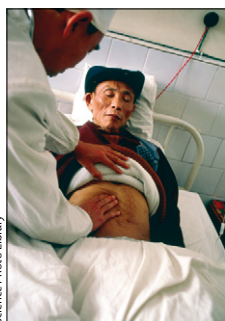


China unveils plans for health-care reform



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China's liberalisation of market forces for health care in the 1990s has failed to meet the needs and aspirations of its population. 400 million people are without adequate care and, as Gonghuan Yang and colleagues highlight in *The Lancet* today, the country faces massive and unnecessary morbidity as a result of poor preventive care. In response to growing public dissatisfaction and after extensive consultation, the Government released draft reforms on Oct 14, and, unusually, invited comments from the public. The proposed system of health care "with Chinese characteristics" places people—rather than profits—first, and aims to provide safe, effective, convenient, and affordable basic care for all citizens by 2020.

The draft reforms are long on aims, but short on details. However, the general goals, particularly basic insurance for 90% of the people by 2010, are encouraging and would fill many cracks in the present system. For consumers, health promotion and education, occupational and environmental health, care for migrants, and food hygiene will be welcomed. For health providers, there is a commitment to improved medical education, continuing

professional development, and standards of training, particularly for primary care. Mental-health services are mentioned, research is encouraged, and private care will continue. An emphasis on humanitarian qualities in health workers is hoped to restore public respect for doctors and other health professionals.

The role of health managers, administrators, and budgets to improve efficiency and quality is stressed. Performance markers will assess individuals and institutions and might determine salaries, which will be controversial, as will the bold, but sensible, moves to establish an essential drugs list with fixed prices, and standardised guidelines for investigation and treatment.

The proposed reforms set high targets, to which the Government will be held to account by the people of China. Pilot studies will be important in achieving those targets, but they must be done with scientific rigour and objectivity. Far better to allow pilots to fail and to improve health care as a result, than to repeat the mistakes of the 1992 health reforms by embracing an ideology, rather than the evidence. ■ [The Lancet](#)

For the draft of *Opinions on deepening the healthcare system reform* [in Chinese] see http://shs.ndrc.gov.cn/yg/qwll/t20080401_202378.htm

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