

## **Absence of humanities in China's training of psychiatrists**

### **Summary**

Contemporary psychiatry need insights from the humanities and the arts, because they can complement medical science and technology through their contrasting perspectives. Neglect of medicine humanities of psychiatry, as of result, maltreatment events of patients with mental disorders have occurred sometimes. We believe that psychiatrists should pay attention to both brain and mind, rather than only the brain, especially in China.

### **Declaration of interest**

None.

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It is said that absence of humanities in China's medical education system.<sup>1</sup> We believe this situation not only in general medical education areas, but also in psychiatric

education in China.

China's mental health service originated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, in Guangzhou Psychiatric Hospital (1898) of China. Since then, many other psychiatric hospitals had been established in other places of China, such as Beijing (1906), Suzhou (1923), and Shanghai (1935).<sup>2</sup> From a medical historical perspective, most Chinese psychiatrists were deeply affected by German psychiatrist Emil Kraepelin, Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler, American psychiatrist Adolf Meyer, and Russian physiologist Ivan Petrovich from 1949 to 1978. These well-known psychiatrists' academic views were mainly derived from biological psychiatry. As China's reform and opening up, China's mental health services have made great development in psychiatric hospitals, hospital-based service, professional training, scientific research, and etc. From 1978 to now, Chinese psychiatrists more focused on research of genetics, neurobiology, and/or psychopharmacology than other psychiatric areas in addition to daily clinical work as they were deeply affected by biomedical model and the evidence-based medicine. However, with the development of social-economy in contemporary China, public health officials have gradually paid attention to the balanced-care

model between hospital-based and community-based mental health services.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, some psychiatrists also begin to regard the important role of psychosocial interventions in psychiatric treatment which has been emphasized in the national mental health law (2012).<sup>4</sup>

Even though Chinese psychiatrists pay more attention to comprehensive opinion on mental disorders and current psychiatry, but they seldom have a cultural perspective. For example, it is asserted Chinese psychiatrists only from medical perspective to understand 'neurasthenia' even though it should be understood from widely medical and social-cultural perspectives.<sup>5</sup> Why does this happen? The main reason may be that most of Chinese psychiatrists lack of appropriate education of the humanism. Chinese psychiatrists are still obviously influenced by biological psychiatry. Moreover textbook of psychiatry in undergraduate education has no more detail discussing ethics in China, not like that in UK.<sup>6,7</sup>

In other words, Chinese psychiatrists pay more attention to the brain rather than the mind, even though both of brain and mind are important. In fact, this reflects that views of Chinese psychiatrists are more likely to be reductionist rather

than holistic approaches in methodology.

But, psychiatry should be included both medical science and humanism.<sup>8-11</sup> Contemporary psychiatry will still need insights from the humanities and the arts, because they can complement medical science and technology through their contrasting perspectives.<sup>12</sup> Neglect of medicine humanities of psychiatry, as of result, maltreatment events of patients with mental disorders have occurred sometimes in China.

From May 1, 2013, the national mental health law of China has come into effect. The balance between public security and protecting personal freedom has been emphasized. This means that the national mental health law is not only for social control, but also for protecting the rights of patients with mental disorders. Only strengthen the training of the humanism, Chinese psychiatrists and other mental health staff (e.g., psychiatric nurses, mental health social workers, clinical psychologists, etc.) can better protect human right of patients with mental disorders.

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