

# The Future of US-PRC Governmental Collaboration in Health Services Research

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The descriptive study of health services in Shanghai County and the subsequent workshop held at the Shanghai First Medical College were seen by both sides—US and China—as being very successful, demonstrating a strong mutual interest in vigorous collaboration, free exchange of ideas, and eagerness to proceed into further cooperative activities.

While we are still in the early phases of this binational approach to health services research, it may be appropriate to look ahead to directions that collaboration may take in the future. These will be only tentative considerations, since any proposed activities must first be mutually agreed to by the two sides and approved by the Joint Committee as specified under the Protocol. With that important caveat, it is interesting to look ahead to what might develop in this cooperative research relationship.

Further collaborative work could be seen as falling into at least four categories:

*Studies by the Chinese of health services delivery and research in the United States:*

● A Chinese delegation from Shanghai County and the Shanghai First Medical College has visited California, Georgia, Maryland, and Massachusetts, observing and studying health services delivery and research. They considered approaches and methodologies to help them understand more fully the patterns of illness in the US, how health services are organized and financed, how they are used by the public, and the problems to be addressed.

A product of the Shanghai County Workshop was a mutually agreed upon list of guiding principles in setting priorities for future cooperative studies including:

● Health problems to be studied will be selected that are of importance to the community and whose study will lead to feasible interventions in improving health;

● Proposed projects will be assessed in terms of their feasibility in being conducted under local conditions;

● During the process of study, attempts will be made to incorporate appropriate technology into the research program and at the same time to provide every opportunity for mutual sharing of skills and knowledge between Chinese and American health personnel;

● All suggested study programs should be of mutual interest to both Chinese and American scientists.

*Further potential studies of health problems and health services in Shanghai County:*

● The health status of peasants, an expanded household survey, more extensive studies of the various modes of financing health services, and assessments of the quality of care;

● Community environmental planning, including issues related to housing, environmental pollution, and biogas generating systems;

● Preventable diseases, both communicable—such as tuberculosis, hepatitis, and gastrointestinal infections—and non-communicable—such as nutritional problems, including rickets, iron-deficiency anemia in pregnancy, accidents and smoking-related morbidity and mortality;

● Barefoot doctors, including the quality of care they give, the training they receive, and their relationships with the rest of the health team and with the commune;

● Pregnancy outcomes, including complications of pregnancy, detection and prevention of birth defects, problems associated with low birthweight, and causes of perinatal mortality;

● The role and functions of a teaching demonstration center, pursued jointly by academic and local authorities.

Thus, it was clear at the Workshop that there would be great interest in pursuing further studies together in Shanghai County. These and other possibilities are currently under consideration for submission to the Joint Committee.

*Comparative studies, using selected geographical areas and health and health services issues in China and the US:*

● Even though the two countries have very different levels of economic development and resources spent on health, there are surprising similarities in some health parameters. Indeed, some health indices are more favorable for Shanghai County than the US. For example, Shanghai County has lower perinatal and infant mortality rates, lower vehicular accident rates, and much greater availability and frequency of utilization of health services than is the case in many parts of the United States. Further, with communicable diseases no longer one of the leading causes of death in Shanghai County, the current leading causes of death are similar to those in most of the United States—cancer, stroke, heart disease. While there might be limited utility in elaborate comparative analyses, selective comparative studies can be valuable in enhancing mutual understanding of one another's problems. These comparative approaches should lead to more analytic studies designed to gain information that would improve primary health services.

*Sharing the methods and results of the Shanghai Study with other parts of China:*

● Following the Shanghai Study and Workshop, there was considerable interest in inviting other institutions and counties in China to review the methods and data coming out of the Shanghai County study. The possibility was raised of encouraging others to pursue health development programs analogous to those of Shanghai County, and of promoting

the development of a network of institutions and field programs that could be used for collaborative and comparative studies.

- The suggestions that emerged from the Shanghai Workshop will receive further consideration by both sides as proposals are developed for future activities and submitted to the Joint Committee.

- Underlying these program possibilities are some broad objectives of the cooperation in health services research, namely: to learn about one another's health system, to share in the development of improved methods for

studying health system problems, to support training opportunities for professionals who will have key roles in this field, and to communicate findings with others both within our own countries and internationally.

There is every reason to believe that the future is open-ended with respect to the kinds of health services research that are of mutual interest and can be jointly investigated. Certainly this area contributes to the larger purpose of the Agreement for Cooperation in Science and Technology between the two countries, that of promoting greater understanding between our two peoples.