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Letter to the Editor

Psychological crisis interventions in Sichuan Province during the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak



2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) is a coronavirus identified as the cause of an outbreak of respiratory illness in Wuhan, China. It was first detected in a large seafood and animal market in December, 2019, and a rapidly growing number of patients was affected with Novel Coronavirus in the next two months. As of the 10th of February, 2020, National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China reported 40,235 confirmed cases and 23,589 suspected cases, with 909 deaths. 24 countries all over the world, including US, Japan, France, reported 319 confirmed cases, with 1 death.

The International Health Regulations (IHR) defines a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) as an extraordinary event determined "to constitute a public health risk to other States through the international spread of disease and to potentially require a coordinated international response." Consideration should be given to the seriousness of the public health impact, novelty and scale of the disease, and the implications for international public health. Five such emergencies have been declared to date including H1N1 Influenza in 2009, polio in 2014, Ebola in West Africa in 2014, Zika in 2016, and 2019 Ebola in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). On January 30, 2020, the novel coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan, China was judged to be declared as PHEIC by WHO.

On January 25, 2020, 30 provinces and municipalities all over the country initiated first level emergency response to control the course of the epidemic. Sichuan Province, which had the third largest population in China, began to take extremely strict measures immediately to prevent the spread of the disease. As of February 10, 2020, the government of Sichuan Province reported 405 confirmed cases with 1 death.

With the infectivity and harmfulness of the virus, and increasing number of confirmed cases and deaths, negative emotion was spreading under this grim situation, and the outbreaks threatened mental health of the population. A large number of people had emotional breakdown, and they felt helpless, fear, anxious, depressed, guilty and nervous. Therefore, how to maintain mental health of citizens became an important issue.

Psychological crisis intervention was needed, and Sichuan Province has provided several psychological aid strategies for the citizens.

Firstly, a psychological intervention and self-help manual of novel coronavirus pneumonia (NCP) was published on February 4. It was

written by experts in the field of psychiatry and psychology in Sichuan Province. The authors introduced several self-help intervention methods in detail according to eleven different populations, including general public, anxious people, suspected patients, confirmed patients, family members of the patients with mental disorders, family members of confirmed cases, medical workers, psychologists, administrative staff, police and office workers. Now, the manual is free online for the public to get access.

Secondly, from February 6, Sichuan province opened several 24-hour psychological assistance hotlines for free to general public, and it provided channels for citizens to relieve their negative emotions. More than 70 volunteers joined this program. In the meantime, the online psychological consultation was opened in several hospitals in Sichuan Province. Since non-critical patients were advised not to come to hospitals during the outbreak, the psychological hotline and online consultation played a significant role of maintaining mental health of citizens in this outbreak.

In addition, in order to better understand mood status of the population, an online survey about mental health status of medical workers, suspected and confirmed cases in the outbreak was carried out. All the participants would get some advice according to their scores of the survey.

All in all, stay healthy mentally is as important as stay healthy physically, and the medical workers need to pay attention to the mental health status of the population in the outbreak.

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There is no funding involvement.

Declaration of Competing Interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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