
Public Health in China

Volume 1

Series editor

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Zunyou Wu
Editor

HIV/AIDS in China

Beyond the Numbers



PEOPLE'S MEDICAL PUBLISHING HOUSE



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Foreword 1

This book tells the fascinating story of the arrival of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in a very conservative country and China's initially halting, but ultimately aggressive response to it. Rather than concentrating on abstract numbers, the authors present the human side of the epidemic both from the perspective of those most affected and the public health leaders who showed great courage and innovation in confronting it. China responded to this epidemic in its own way, basing many of its strategies on the results of cutting edge research gleaned not only from research but also by incorporating the assistance of those most at risk of HIV infection, including sex workers, drug users, plasma donors and men who had sex with men. As a result of the leadership of these public health innovators China has a comprehensive approach which includes the world's largest methadone treatment programme and a comprehensive plan for monitoring all HIV-infected persons to facilitate successful treatment. It is truly a fascinating saga that should be read by anyone interested in HIV/AIDS.

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Foreword 2

A candid account of the evolution of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in China over the last three decades. The government overcame its early ambivalence and mounted a campaign which provides HIV prevention and treatment solutions that are socially and culturally adapted to the domestic reality. The National Centre for AIDS/STD Control and Prevention has emerged as a pioneer in the implementation and evaluation of innovative programmes, in particular expanding treatment as a way of preventing AIDS and premature mortality and secondarily limiting new infections. They are generating peer reviewed evidence that is helping to shape AIDS control efforts globally. China is strongly positioned to face the remaining challenges to control the epidemic and to contribute to the global attainment of the United Nations 90-90-90 Target as a means to end the AIDS pandemic for 2030.

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This book would not have been possible without your assistance.

¹Chinese names are conventionally given with the family name preceding the given names. In this book, we retain that convention for national leaders (e.g. President Xi Jinping). Officials, scientists and others are referred to using the Western convention, in which given names precede the family name (e.g. epidemiologist Xiwen Zheng).

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Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
CAP+	China Alliance of People Living with HIV/AIDS
CCM	Country Coordinating Mechanism
CD4 cell	A type of white blood cell, an essential part of the human immune system
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CHAIN	China HIV/AIDS Information Network
China CDC	Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention
CNY	Chinese currency yuan
CRIMS	Comprehensive Response Information Management System
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
NBA	National Basketball Association
NCAIDS	National Centre for AIDS/STD Control and Prevention (China)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PrEP	pre-exposure prophylaxis
PSB	Public Security Bureau
SARS	Severe acute respiratory syndrome
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
UNAIDS	The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
US CDC	United States Centres for Disease Control and Prevention
WHO	World Health Organization

Introduction

The story of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) in China over the last three decades has been a gripping one: it is a tale first of exclusion and fear and then, by turns, of involuntary tragedy, cautious experimentation and finally vigorous response. Above all, it has been a story of learning, first by a small group of dedicated doctors and public health specialists who had the courage to face the facts and propose unorthodox solutions and later on by a broader group of policy makers and social groups. The voices of those most affected by the epidemic have grown stronger over time so that now, thirty years after the first case of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (or AIDS) was identified in China, the country is willing actively to face the challenges of an epidemic that has touched families throughout this vast nation, rather than to deny and marginalise those living with HIV.

This book follows the narrative of China's HIV epidemic in some detail. Reaching beyond the numbers and figures that are often used to outline the impact of HIV on a population, the authors have aimed to take the reader behind the scenes and to bring to the forefront the voices of the scientists and officials on the frontlines of China's experience with HIV. Many of these people have been generous with their time, providing extensive interviews for this book, and you will find them quoted throughout. While their stories and the wider narrative do not always make comfortable reading, everyone involved felt that it was important to give an honest account of these events; they all recognise that the lessons of the past have contributed in important ways to the strength and success of China's response at present.

This book is largely chronologically arranged, with each chapter focusing on a particular phase or aspect of the epidemic or the response. Chap. 1 illustrates how China's social and moral environment at the dawn of the epidemic led its leaders to hope that HIV could simply be kept out of China by excluding foreigners. This hope was shattered with the unexpected discovery of an indigenous HIV epidemic among injection drug users in southwestern China. Chap. 2 examines the tragic infection of hundreds of thousands of former plasma sellers in central China. Chap. 3 introduces the AIDS warriors and their early efforts to understand, through carefully designed research, how best to prevent the spread of HIV in the groups at highest risk for infection in China. Chap. 4 examines the factors that catapulted HIV up the political

agenda, allowing public health officials and their partners to tackle HIV and risk behaviours more vigorously. The controversial programme of mass testing, which opened the door to more treatment, is the focus of Chap. 5. The next Chap. 6, describes the rapid, nationwide expansion of both treatment and prevention programmes for those most at risk. The Chinese government moves centre stage in Chap. 7, as it takes strong leadership of a previously fragmented response, while increasing its partnerships with civil society. In Chap. 8, HIV-related stigma, which continues to constrain how the people of China deal with HIV, is discussed. The ninth and final chapter draws together the lessons that China has learned through the ups and downs of its 30-year HIV epidemic.

While the heart of this book takes the reader “beyond” the numbers, the numbers themselves are fascinating and when seen through the eyes of an epidemiologist reveal the ever-changing patterns of HIV infection in China over time and across the nations’ geographies. An appendix (Chap. 10) at the end of this volume provides a detailed account of the 30 years of epidemiological data collected throughout China’s epidemic, together with information on funding and service provision. It provides figures and graphs that illustrate the dramatic ways in which the HIV epidemic had changed from its inception to the end of 2015 and shows how expanding services have affected that change.

Though China’s experience has been unique in some respects, it is an experience that provides valuable lessons for other countries as they confront their own HIV epidemics. Principal among these lessons is the importance of basing decisions on information that is carefully collected and honestly analysed, rather than on ideology. We hope the examples highlighted in this book will prove useful to those who are curious about the history of HIV in China, as well as to those who are faced with the challenges of preventing the spread of HIV and of caring for those already infected in other parts of the world.

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