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NURTURING THE WORLD OF TOMORROW

Hepatitis awareness promo launched

Disease said to be of epidemic proportions in China with 10 million infected

By LIU JIE
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Jiang Meifang, 28, married in February and planned to have a baby soon. But she had to change her mind after being diagnosed with hepatitis C last month.

HEALTH "But I think I am lucky, because hepatitis C is mother-infant transmission. If I had not found it, I might have a baby born with the disease," she said. Jiang said she had never heard of the disease before receiving a brochure at a hospital promoting related knowledge and offering blood tests.

The promotion based on a bus that travels to different hospitals is offered by Roche China Co under a program co-initiated by the drug maker and China Health Education Center under the Ministry of Health and guided by the Chinese Center For Disease Control And Prevention affiliated to the ministry.

The program aims to popularize knowledge of hepatitis C, increase people's awareness of the disease and conduct screening on a large scale.

Statistics from the Ministry of Health show that there are around 10 million hepatitis C-infected people in China cur-



Wang Zhao (right), vice-chairwoman of the Chinese Foundation for Hepatitis Prevention and Control, and Mao Qun'an (center), director of the China Health Education Center under the Ministry of Health, attending a forum sponsored by Roche China on prevention and control of hepatitis C in Beijing.

rently. In 2011, newly reported hepatitis C cases exceeded 170,000 around the nation, a year-on-year increase of 13.1 percent. New cases of the disease are three times that of hepatitis B.

"The situation is very serious in China since few people in the nation know about hepatitis C and the incubation period of the epidemic disease is relatively long. Moreover, there is no vaccine for this disease," said Wang Zhao, vice-chairwoman of the Chinese Foundation for Hepatitis Prevention and Con-

trol. Transmission channels for hepatitis C are blood, sex and mother-infant transfer, similar to AIDS.

"This epidemic disease is curable and the earlier, the sooner, the better," said Wei Lai, vice-president of Peking University's People's Hospital, adding that is the reason medical professionals should pay considerable attention to increasing awareness of it and conduct large-scale screening.

Roche launched its hepatitis C mobile station in mid-2011 free of charge. The bus had

traveled 21,687 kilometers to 62 key hospitals in 32 Chinese cities by the end of last year, the company said.

It plans to visit 76 hospitals in 42 cities this year, hosting more than 50 free consultancy and test activities this year. It is expected to involve more than 700 doctors specializing in hepatitis treatment.

Roche said that a new screening technology will be adopted on its mobile bus this year. That means the result can be obtained within five minutes and, if there is doubt, the blood

sample can be directly sent to hospitals for further analysis instead of asking the people to go to hospital for another round of blood collection. The new method is estimated to save 600 yuan (\$94) for each test. It will increase screening efficiency and provide conve-



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nience for people taking part in the test.

In addition to the awareness and screening program, Roche China launched a philanthropic project on hepatitis C prevention, control and treatment in rural China. Since last August, the company has been cooperating with the Chinese Hospital Association to offer public education, free screening and free medication for poverty-stricken people in Putian, in Fujian province, Jianping, in Liaoning province, and Kuancheng in Hebei province.

Unlike the mobile promotion station in cities, the proj-

ect carried out in rural China is mainly to ease the financial burden on relatively impoverished hepatitis C patients and decrease the incidence of the disease in more remote areas, where hygiene conditions and health consciousness are comparatively weak.

Medical professionals said that cross-infection in hospitals is also a very serious problem in China now. It is caused by a lack of standards in operations, improper sterilization and repeated use of medical devices in some medical institutes.

To solve the problem, China issued the first related regulation in July. It offers guidance for medical practitioners to handle hepatitis C infection and standardizes the screening and reporting mechanism.

"The regulation is not only to prevent transmission among patients but also to protect the safety of doctors and nurses," said Hu Bijie, a committee member of the Chinese Preventive Medicine Association, which drafted the regulation.

Jiang said that she is under therapy at home. "Doctors said as long as I keep to the rules he told me, my family and people around me will not be infected. And as my disease has not become chronic, I can be cured in a short period of time and have a baby then."

charity briefs

At least 19 dead after Hebei storms

At least 19 people have been confirmed dead and 20 others were missing in rain-triggered disasters from July 21 to 23 in North China's Hebei province, Xinhua News Agency reported on July 24.

The rainstorms brought floods and hail to 58 counties in the province, leading to the evacuation of 177,000 people, according to the bureau.

A relief fund of 20 million yuan (\$3.1 million), 300 tents, 500 coats as well as 10,000 quilts had been allocated to the affected areas by the provincial civil affairs bureau and the provincial department of finance on Monday evening.

National disaster relief and civil affairs authorities initiated a fourth-grade emergency response and sent teams to the province to direct relief work.

Rural school closures halted

The Ministry of Education has issued a circular banning the "blind" closures and mergers of rural public schools over concerns regarding road safety and students' commuting times, Xinhua News Agency reported.

County-level governments must work out feasible plans for the locations of their elementary and primary schools in accordance with local conditions, according to a circular issued by the ministry.

The closures and mergers of rural schools will be suspended until the plan is approved by the provincial government, said the circular.

The government has been making efforts to optimize educational resources in rural areas since 2002, urging schools to reassemble or merge in order to distribute education more fairly.

The ministry said it will collect opinions and comments from the public until Aug 6.

Mildew discovered in infant formula

Local authorities in Guangzhou, capital of South China's Guangdong province, said they have discovered mildew contamination in some infant formula products during an ongoing dairy safety overhaul, Xinhua reported.

Excessive amounts of aflatoxin were detected in five formula products that were produced between July and December last year in Central China's Hunan

province, according to a statement issued by the municipal industry and commerce department.

Four of the products were produced by Ava Dairy Co (Ava Dairy) based in Hunan's capital of Changsha, while the fifth was produced by Hunan Ava Dairy Holdings Co Ltd, the parent company of Ava Dairy, the statement said.

The department has ordered retailers to suspend sales of the products pending further investigation.

Food safety authorities in Changsha city on Sunday launched a comprehensive investigation of the companies following the news in Guangzhou.

Aflatoxin is produced by a fungus that commonly grows on grain and peanuts. High levels of the toxin have been shown to lead to cancer in animal tests.

Red Cross Society donations down

The Red Cross Society of Beijing received a total of 37.13 million yuan of donations in the first half of this year, newspaper Beijing News reported.

"Small-amount donations from the public have reduced dramatically in this year compared with a year ago," said Liu Na, vice-president of the society. The decline in public donations came after a series of scandals last year involving the charity organization.

The society pledged to build an information disclosure platform, releasing real-time donation information to the public, in a bid to improve transparency.

Free medicine for leukemia sufferers

International pharmaceutical company Bristol-Myers Squibb Co and the Cancer Foundation of China joined hands to launch a medicine donation program for chronic myelogenous leukemia patients.

The program targets poverty-stricken people suffering from the blood disease and is to start from August 1. Bristol-Myers Squibb will donate its newly developed medicine, specifically for chronic myelogenous leukemia treatment, to selected patients who cannot afford medication and are diagnosed by appointed doctors.

The program is to cover 82 hospitals in 21 cities, in which 150 doctors trained by the Cancer Foundation of China are to provide consulting services for patients with chronic myelogenous leukemia, one of most serious three types of leukemia in China.

Movie makeover for sight impaired

A project to provide movies with oral descriptions for the enjoyment of the visually impaired was launched at the China Braille Library, Xinhua reported.

Four film organizations sponsoring the project have donated 100 movies and 98 of their staff have volunteered to do the transcription work, according to Wang Lili, an official at the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television.

Wang said most of the volunteers are filmmakers or film researchers.

The project was jointly launched by the China Film Science and Technology Research Institute, China Film Art Research Center, China Movie Channel Program Center and the Administration Center of Digital Film Content.

Lesbians allowed to give blood

Lesbians in China are being allowed to donate blood after the Ministry of Health issued a revision of blood-donation regulations.

Although lesbians are allowed to donate blood, male homosexuals are still banned from doing so because of the group's high HIV infection rate. The revision took effect on July 1.

About 3 percent of Chinese men who have sexual intercourse with other men are HIV positive, a proportion far higher than the average for the entire population, which stands at about 0.057 percent, said Xinhua News Agency, citing official statistics.

Previous regulation prohibited all homosexuals from giving blood.

Shenzhen to ban bad behavior

The southern city of Shenzhen is likely to implement regulations against "uncivilized behavior," the People's Daily reported.

Some 50 forms of behavior including throwing litter out of cars and keeping unregistered pet dogs will be punished, according to the regulation. Violators may be asked to carry out public service or be banned from applying for jobs as civil servants, said the report.

The report did not disclose when the new regulation will be carried out.

CHINA DAILY — AGENCIES

Would-be scientist, 13, wins study trip to US as first Chinese delegate

By SHEN JINGTING
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Zhang Boya, 13, a grade two junior middle school student in Beijing, loves nature and dreams of becoming a scientist — and her resolve was strengthened in May during a trip to the United States.

All her childhood, Zhang has been the apple of her parents' and teachers' eyes. She won various prizes for performing, singing, photography and writing. Most of all, she loves inventing things based on her creative thoughts.

She was chosen as the first Chinese delegate to the United States in May to undertake scientific projects, visit college laboratories and share ideas with young students who have the same interests as her.

"I was really excited. During the trip I learned how great inventions are created and was even more inspired to become a scientist," Zhang told China Daily.

"Study is full of fun because every piece of knowledge I learn today may play a role in my future innovation," she added.

For example, a group of 18 young children from different countries gathered to visit laboratories in Carnegie Mellon University, extracting DNA from strawberries and participating in projects related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

The US trip sponsor, Broadcom Foundation, called the program ZHANG attended "Broadcom MASTERS." Paula Golden, executive director of the Broadcom Foundation, said the program is designed to inspire junior school students to



Broadcom MASTERS delegates from different countries attending the science study tour in the United States in May, sponsored by Broadcom Foundation.

continue studying mathematics and science in order to achieve a personal goal or aspiration.

"The Broadcom MASTERS brings together young people who share a passion for innovation and inspires them to stay with math and science throughout junior schools and into exciting careers," she said.

Delegates are chosen from among the program participants of junior school students by judges at the Society for Science & the Public's affiliated fairs in countries including Canada, China, India and the United Kingdom.

"In addition, through the program, children learned to be more cooperative and develop a team

spirit," Golden said. In common situations, most work cannot be carried out by one individual but needs collective support from various researchers.

Zhang Haifeng, the father of Zhang Boya and also a doctor of applied psychology, said when his daughter came back from the United States, many of her classmates were excited as well.

"Not every child has a chance like Boya to experience an innovative trip to the US so my daughter shared her American stories with her classmates," Zhang said.

"Many Chinese students only know they need to study but do not know why they should study," Zhang Boya's experi-

ence showed her friends that if you are really passionate about something, you should put your heart into it and persistent dedication will be discovered and rewarded, he added.

Zhang Boya said she had failures and frustrations during her inquiries but encouragement from her parents and teachers helped her to maintain the confidence to carry on. "The trip was also an encouragement. It ignited my curiosity and strengthened my faith in chasing my dreams," she said.

"The trip also told me I am not alone because I have so many friends of my age across the world and we have similar interests," Zhang Boya added.

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