

TIBET HEALTH: Strengthening systems, enhancing skills



“The right program, at the right time, in the right place, with the right people.”

That was the conclusion of a recent independent technical review of the Tibet Health Capacity Building Program (Tibet Health), an Australian Aid program underway in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), managed by Burnet Institute in association with Australian Red Cross. Implemented in partnership with the Tibet Regional Health & Family Planning Commission, Tibet Health represents the latest in a decade-long relationship between the three agencies, funded by the Australian government, working together to strengthen the TAR health system.

Tibet Health focuses on providing technical support to improve management and clinical capacity within the TAR health system. It is aligned with plans for health reform at both the regional and national levels, and represents a significant investment in supporting the improvement of health outcomes for the three million people living in TAR.

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“After taking the training, I trained staff in my division. Now our division’s doctor-patient communication skills have been improved, their understanding of health law has been strengthened, and prevention measures for hospital infection control have been reinforced.”

Manager, Gynaecology and Obstetrics Department, Tibetan Medicine Hospital, Lhasa.

Strengthening management skills and systems

Since 2012, training for more than 1,000 senior and mid-level managers from health bureaus, hospitals and Centres for Disease Control has been conducted.

Guided by the TAR’s plan for health reform, the program supports participants to plan and instigate changes in their own workplaces based on theoretical training.

Tibet Health also provides opportunities for managers and staff not directly involved in program activities to join study trips to observe and learn more about successful approaches adopted elsewhere.

Standardising practice to promote systems improvements

A key early activity supported the Tibet Regional Health & Family Planning Commission (TRHFPC) in developing guidelines for county hospitals and township clinics to standardise services. After intensive consultation between TAR and national experts, these service guidelines were approved nationally and are currently in use.

It is expected their application will strengthen county hospital and township clinic staff capacity in management and priority clinical areas, and assist the TRHFPC to assess and monitor the provision of services.

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Bomi County Hospital has established a clinical and nursing quality leadership group, developed a performance assessment scheme, rebuilt pharmacy and patient registration points, and developed a hospital classification assessment plan.

Building capacity for sustainable change

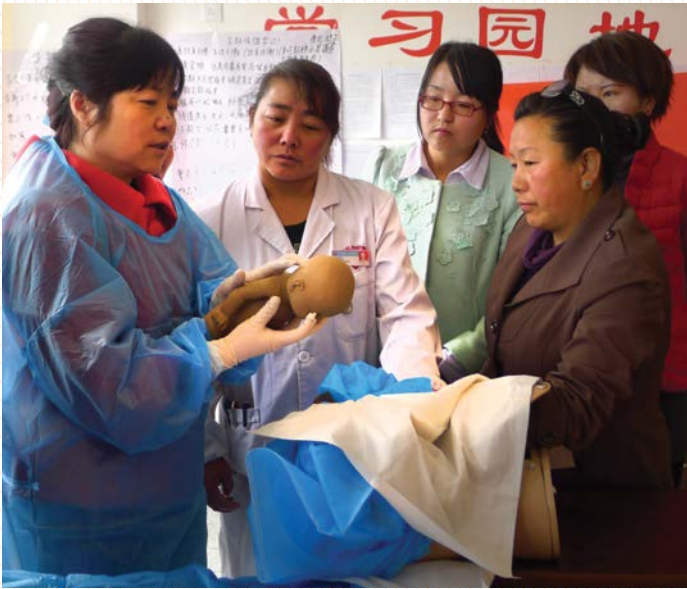
Tibet Health seeks to provide technical assistance to support capacity building at

individual, organisation and health system levels, drawing on expertise from within China, and, increasingly, from within TAR and the western region of China. Providing the opportunity for national and local experts to collaborate has created and nurtured professional networks.

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“Before I attended the TOT, I was not good at interacting with trainees and I did not usually listen to feedback about my training. I only prepared PowerPoint slides, but never thought about training methodology. Now I think about what methods I should use to improve training outcomes, what the trainees will be interested in and how to evaluate the training outcomes.”

Paediatrician, Dr. Dazhen, at Regional No.2 People’s Hospital, TAR.

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Building the capacity of health trainers working within the TAR health system also involves a training-of-trainers (TOT) course, tailored by an expert from the University of Melbourne. It is delivered by a group of national and international experts, providing a series of modules to a group with responsibilities for medical training at Tibet



➤ Training-of-trainers course.

University Medical College and within hospitals.

As their skills and confidence increase, it is expected some TOT participants will co-facilitate or lead select sessions of the paediatrics, gynaecology and obstetrics clinical skills training initiated by Tibet Health in 2015. This training will target county, and maternal and child health hospitals, and will improve the quality of services available to mothers, babies and children.

The first phase of Tibet Health concludes at the end of 2015. Much progress has been made towards realising the program's goal of improving the health of the people in Tibet, reinforcing this through improving clinical and management capacity within the health system.

As one respondent to the recent technical review commented: "A focus on capacity building is more sustainable than providing equipment."

Ensuring safe blood supply in Lhasa and beyond

The Regional Blood Centre (RBC) has been supported since its inception in 2005 by Australian Aid, initially through the Tibet Health Sector Support Program (2004-2010) and more recently by Tibet Health.

In 2013, the RBC, through the Tibet Health program, addressed challenges in both management and technical capacity. A plan developed by an expert from Shandong University enabled managers to join the senior level management training series. It also invited experts from two leading Beijing hospitals to lead tailored clinical training and support a study tour for managers from RBC and prefecture blood stations to visit three inland blood centres to observe processes.

These initiatives have led to increasing confidence among RBC managers to lead change, strengthened internal management processes and improved motivation of staff.

New processes to manage blood collection and record keeping have been developed, new methods of blood donor recruitment trialled, and a blood donor law drafted for consideration by regional authorities.



⤴ Holistic nursing at No.1 People's Hospital.

Burnet in China

From the rural setting of the Tibet Autonomous Region to our biomedical research laboratory in Nanjing, Burnet continues to strengthen its long-term commitment to its China program.

Building on nearly 20 years of engagement, Burnet is actively developing its presence in this complex and fast-changing environment.

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"Our team is doing an incredible job of supporting tangible improvements in the management and delivery of essential health services. This is quite distinct from our emerging program of biomedical research with partners in Beijing, Shanghai and Nanjing, which focuses on our expertise in translational research. Our vision for the China Program is a complementary suite of initiatives that are responsive to local priorities and capacities, working collaboratively with our partners to deliver better health for all." – Ms Lisa Renkin, Head, China Program, Burnet Institute

Recent successes with sourcing Chinese government grants and independent Chinese investment have supported the establishment of the Institute's first commercial offshore entity, in Victoria's sister-state Jiangsu. The Institute's Nanjing-based company, Nanjing BioPoint Diagnostic Technology Ltd will facilitate the development of a low-cost, point-of-care assay for liver function, and eventually become a vehicle for a pipeline of Burnet diagnostic innovations with ready access to domestic Chinese and global markets.

A continuing focus on public health research in the Western region of China includes our partnership with Kunming Medical University, the National Centre for STDs, the National Centre for Women and Children's Health (part of the Chinese CDC system), and joint initiatives such as field validation studies for the VISITECT® CD4 point-of-care test to be conducted in Guangxi and Yunnan provinces.

For more information on Burnet's China Program visit burnet.edu.au



◀ HE Ms Frances Adamson, Australian Ambassador to China with Dr Lai Youwen.

Improving health outcomes:

Team Leader, Dr Lai Youwen shares his insights

It's been my honour to play a role in three of the four technical cooperation projects funded by Australia in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) of China since 1998, with a primary focus of supporting Tibet's health system. The most significant change over time has been the shift away from requests by counterparts for physical resources and towards capacity building.

Tibet Health was designed to provide support to build the capacity of individuals, health agencies and the health system. Since its commencement, the program has been assisting the Tibet Regional Health and Family Planning Commission (TRHFPC) to fulfill the Twelfth National Five Year Plan for Health, which concentrates on improving health system capacity through improved management and clinical capacity from regional to township level.

Strategically, the program works with the TRHFPC to develop guidelines and standards while ensuring that its

plans are aligned with the TAR's. In practical terms, the program provides support to individuals and agencies in the form of training, work placement, study tours, field guidance and qualification courses. The program is designed to raise awareness of good practice, apply skills learnt through training, and institutionalise these standards.

During the first two years of the program, a range of training activities including hospital management, public health management and clinical workflow has been provided. Following the training, many participants have carried out operational research (or 'field improvements', as the term is best understood in China) through the program field activities or under their own auspices. These include modifications to management rules and regulations, revised clinical standards, and setting up new rules or committees for improving the management of essential areas

within the agencies, such as hospital infection control. Key counterparts have been closely involved in the development of guidelines and standards. This has proved to be one of the most effective ways to build capacity and promote ownership, as well as encouraging sustainability.

Of the many factors contributing to the effective implementation of the program, a strong, well qualified team is at the top of the list. The program's 10 technical staff - comprising two PhDs, six with Masters' degrees and two with Bachelor's qualifications - has extensive international and TAR-specific experience. As the program is developing, so too is the professionalism of its team members. This has long-term benefits for the ongoing health system reform currently underway throughout China, as I'm sure our team members will continue to contribute to improvements in health outcomes well beyond their time with us here in Lhasa.

“The Tibet Health program is rightly viewed as a prime example of collaborative development through partnership at all levels. An extremely skilled and talented team is led by our excellent Team Leader, Lai Youwen (Tony). His vast experience, extensive networks, institutional memory, and the esteem in which he is held, make him the perfect advocate for improving health system capacity in Tibet.”

– Professor Robert Power, Program Director, Tibet Health, Burnet Institute.