4. Training System for Specialist Rehabilitation Physicians: Current Status and Future Developments

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Current Status in China
China is a developing country with a population of 1,300 million people, who have limited paying ability for medical treatment. Regional economies are not developing equally and many regions are not prosperous yet. Rehabilitation Medicine started late in China. The government has established some policy for the development of Rehabilitation Medicine; however, a process is required to improve government and public awareness.

In most hospitals, the Rehabilitation Medicine Department is not a “Clinical Department.” The Chinese Public Health Ministry promulgated “Management Standards for the Rehabilitation Medicine Department of the General Hospital” in 1996, but not enough progress has been made since then. As China moves from a planned to a market economy, hospital managers in charge of funding have hesitated to allocate much money to the rehabilitation medicine department, and its budget is usually much smaller than the clinical department’s.

General and Specialized Training
Currently, rehabilitation physicians mostly come from other professional doctor programs and clinical departments of the hospital. This is because there is less acceptance of the education system of the systematic Rehabilitation Medicine program. About 100–150 doctors have obtained a Master’s degree in this area in the past 10 years, however, they have different levels of ability because there is no unified training program.

Most rehabilitation physicians are trained at the graduate or undergraduate university levels. Most are trained and remain in the big cities. The smaller cities and villages still lack doctors and medicine, and if they do have them, they are needed for saving lives and treating diseases. Rehabilitation medicine is hardly on the agenda of a small regional hospital.

Up until now, there is no training and qualification system for the rehabilitation physician in China, which can be compared at equivalent international standard levels. Therefore, the level of most “rehabilitation” doctors is not high, and the patient requiring rehabilitation obtains limited benefit. This interferes with the development of Rehabilitation Medicine in China.

Organization of Specialist Rehabilitation Physicians
The Organization of Specialist Rehabilitation Physicians (Branch of Rehabilitation Doctor of Chinese Medical Doctor Association, CMDA) has just been established in 2003 and, the ability of “upholding power” and “self-education” is just beginning. China joined the WTO, and the medical market is opening up. As a result, the development of rehabilitation medicine in China now has more opportunities and at the same time it is confronted with a huge challenge.

Some rehabilitation doctors can now get PT Master’s degree or a Ph. D. They have the higher foreign language abilities, along with research and teaching experience, but they should also receive clinical training. On the other hand, specialists from clinical departments should also receive continuous systematic rehabilitation medical education. A
majority of rehabilitation doctors who have graduated from medical college must accept basic clinical training (in the Medicine, Surgery, Emergency and so on) for 3 years. Many “rehabilitation doctors” working in the community in China have only undergraduate degrees. Their educational background is low, and their clinical and rehabilitation knowledge is lacking, but the small village clinic supports them and continues to employ them. In the future we hope to accomplish the following:

1. Establish certification exams according to international standards for the specialist rehabilitation physician in China. The CMDA is doing this now.
2. Establish a certification system and define certification levels: Specialist of Rehabilitation Physician, Associate Specialist of Rehabilitation Physician and Community-based Rehabilitation Specialist. The CMDA is cooperating with the Chinese Public Health ministry to control quality.
3. Promote and establish an education base for Specialist Rehabilitation Physicians, ensuring high quality education based on approved standards and uniform teaching materials.
4. Urge government to improve policies for developing rehabilitation medicine in China and oversee this effort.
5. Cooperate with developed countries.