

Chinese rural health system development and reform: a perspective of environment and health

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The aim of this paper is to situate discussions of potential future reforms to strengthen the capacity of the health system to respond to environmental challenges in the context of current efforts to reform the rural health system. It begins with a discussion of the structure of the health system focusing particularly on the elements of the health system with responsibilities concerning environmental issues. It will outline the major challenges the health system has faced in the transition to a market economy and how they have affected the capacity of the health system to meet its responsibilities in the area of environment. It will then discuss recent reforms to explore their impact on public health services. Currently the central government has been preparing a new health reform policy that aims to provide universal coverage to Chinese people. This provides an opportunity to 'insert' environmental health issues into the package. However, the materialization of this intention needs strong advocacy at the central government level backed up by good research and data.