

Psychological safeguards for Chinese People's Liberation Army fighting COVID-19

Ren-Ping Gu ,¹ T Li,¹ L-P Zheng²

Currently, COVID-19 has been effectively controlled in China. The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) has played an important role in combating COVID-19. Over 4000 medical workers from the PLA Ground Force, Navy, Air Force, Rocket Force, Strategic Support Force and Joint Logistic Support Force, as well as several medical institutions of the People's Armed Police were selected in three batches to support Wuhan's fight against COVID-19. They rushed to Wuhan on Chinese New Year's Eve on 24 January 2020 and returned on 16 April 2020. In three temporary hospitals with 2856 beds, the PLA's medical teams treated a total of 7198 confirmed patients, successfully ending their mission with zero infection.

In combating COVID-19, the Chinese central government paid close attention to the mental health of military medical workers and introduced a series of safeguard policies. First, shifts were properly assigned to ensure adequate rest. Front-line medical workers in mobile cabin hospitals or general designated hospitals were not supposed to work continuously for longer than 1 month. Further, their continuous working period in designated hospitals for severe cases was appropriately shortened.¹ Second, psychological support hotlines of colleges and universities were used to

provide psychological support services for medical workers. Self-help psychological counselling groups comprising psychologists and other medical workers were set up in medical institutions to strengthen psychological assistance measures. Psychological crisis intervention and daily psychological counselling were provided particularly for front-line medical workers and their family members, reducing the psychological stress of medical workers. Third, organisations of the Communist Party of China (CPC) were brought into play. The Chinese PLA was founded and has been led by the CPC. It has been performing the CPC's ideological, organisational and political work. Such work plays an important role in the Chinese PLA's operations.² The CPC organisations, to which the front-line medical workers are affiliated, displayed a caring attitude and paid close attention to the mental status and emotional changes of medical workers by having frank conversations with them. They managed to identify psychological problems at an early stage, and conducted intervention and counselling immediately.³

The Chinese government provided mental health services to involved PLA soldiers through various interventions incorporating China's unique ideological, organisational and political approach. This effectively ensured the soldiers' mental health; to date, there have been no reports of psychological issues among this group.

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¹Faculty of Military Health Service, Second Military Medical University, Shanghai, China

²Department of Orthopedics, Shanghai Tenth People's Hospital, Tongji University School of Medicine, Shanghai, China

Correspondence to Dr L-P Zheng, Department of Orthopedics, Shanghai Tenth People's Hospital, Tongji University School of Medicine, Shanghai 200072, China; dr.zheng@tongji.edu.cn

Contributors R-PG and TL were the major contributors in writing the letter. L-PZ was the corresponding author.

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ORCID iD

Ren-Ping Gu <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5855-8363>

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