

# More seeking help for mental illnesses

The number of registered patients with serious mental disorders in China reached 5.4 million last year, with three-quarters of them suffering schizophrenia, China's top health authority said on Friday.

Of the patients, 88.7 percent are under the management of health authorities, and receive public services such as medical care and living subsidies, Wang Bin, deputy chief for disease control and prevention at the National Health and Family Planning Commission, said at a news conference on Friday, which coincided with World Health Day.

Previous figures released by the commission showed the number of such registered patients was 4.3 million by the end of 2014, with 73.2 percent managed by health authorities.

China has been improving mental health services, with the number of institutions that offer such services reaching nearly 3,000 by the end of 2015, compared with 1,650 in 2010, Wang said.

Last year, the number of certified psychiatrists in China exceeded 27,700, and the number of psychotherapists in China exceeded 5,000, she added.

Patients with serious mental disorders have been receiving improved services throughout China with multi-departmental cooperation such as regular follow-up diagnosis and treatment.

In places such as Beijing and Shanghai they also enjoy favorable insurance policies, which provide free medication and more reimbursement for medical bills, according to her.

In Beijing, guardians are eligible for a 2,400 yuan (\$370) annual subsidy from the municipal government if they deliver proper care, according to the city's health and family planning commission.

China faces challenges in improving mental health, due to rising incidences of mental disorders caused by depression, tension, alcohol and dementia, she said.

A survey conducted by professionals from more than 40 psychiatric hospitals and universities in China between 2012 and 2014 found nearly 3.6 percent of Chinese suffer depression-related mental disorders.

Although the rate is lower than countries such as the United States, Australia and South Africa, it saw an increase compared with previous surveys, which may be attributed to increasing psychological pressure on the public due to rapid economic and social development, she said.

The World Health Organization estimates that more than 54 million people in China suffer from depression, and is estimated to cost the nation \$7.8 billion every year from lost work days, medical expenses and funeral

expenses, it said in a statement on Friday.

According to Yu Xin, a professor in psychiatry at Peking University Sixth Hospital, said a major obstacle to prevention and treatment in China is the lack of importance paid to the issue by the public and patients.

“This means only a small portion of people with mental diseases are actually diagnosed and treated,” Yu said.

Lack of facilities and talent at community-level medical institutions are also major obstacles, he added.

“In many other countries, patients with mental disorders first seek treatment at community health centers or their family doctors,” he said. “But in China, most patients go to big comprehensive hospitals first, as other institutes may lack qualified psychiatrists.”

Wang said health authorities will improve capabilities of grassroots hospitals to offer mental health services, such as encouraging top public hospitals to provide training to medical staff.