Current Situation of Endemic Arsenicosis in China

Gui-fan Sun, Shan Liu, Bing Li, Xin Li, Xian-ce Sun, Xiao-ying Guo, Cong Qian and Jing-bo Pi

School of Public Health, China Medical University
Shenyang 110001, P.R.China

*E-mail: sungf@mail.cmu.edu.cn

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The current situation of endemic arsenicosis in China is considered a grave public health problem. At present, the population exposed to high amounts of arsenic is estimated to be over 2 million and more than 20,000 arsenicosis patients are confirmed. Because arsenicosis is the disease of record, it must have a standard for diagnosis. In China we have published the standard for diagnosing patients. The standard was published in the “Chinese Journal of Endemiology” Vol.20, No.1–1, P266, where the symptoms for diagnosis were explained. Perhaps there are differences in standards of diagnosis among countries. Furthermore, new endemic areas are continuously emerging. In affected areas, the identification of wells and coal with high levels of arsenic is continuing sporadically, and a scattered distribution pattern of patients is also being observed accordingly. An extremely serious issue is that a high cancer incidence has been observed in some areas, and the populations in most endemic areas, who have been exposed to high levels of arsenic for about 20 years, could be at a high risk of developing cancer within the next 10 years. Additionally, the situation of arsenicosis is very complex, since a high fluoride content is found in groundwater in almost all endemic arsenicosis areas, and high or low iodine concentrations are also found in some of these areas. Although some preventive measures have been taken in some areas, their scale has been limited for various reasons including the lack of both financial and human resources. It should be mentioned that the current problems of arsenicosis in China reported here are only the beginning. There are still many challenges we have to confront and manage.