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and decentralised collaboration, provides greater transparency and accountability, including announcing a public national vaccine strategy and monitoring system, and develops an effective communications strategy and plan. Meanwhile, COVID-19 cases continue to increase and too many people are dying unnecessarily in a country without timely concerted actions to interrupt the high transmission and reduce the burden of deaths and illness.

We declare no competing interests.

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Wakley–Wu Lien Teh Prize Essay 2020: passing the baton to the next generation of health workers

In 2020, health workers have worked tirelessly in response to COVID-19. For this year's Wakley–Wu Lien Teh Prize,¹ we called for essays of the experiences of health professionals in China during the COVID-19 pandemic and were delighted to receive around 63 submissions. Two editors at the *Lancet* Group shortlisted the top essays, which

were sent anonymously to a voting panel at Peking University and Tsinghua University, Beijing, China. The submissions touched our hearts. Essays depicted the bravery of health workers who left their homes to volunteer on the front lines, the professionalism of doctors and nurses who triaged patients in clinics and cared for the sickest patients in intensive care units,



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Qian Wei

the multidisciplinary team work in Fangcang shelter hospitals, as well as the dedication of public health officials and community health workers who helped to control transmission of the virus. We are grateful for their heroic contributions and for sharing their stories with us. But it was the essay by Qian Wei, a second-year medical student at Nanchang University, Nanchang, China, that caught our eye. Reflecting on her own journey and inner struggles as a young person training to be a doctor during this momentous time in history, her essay shines a light on the sacrifices made by every health worker—and perfectly captures the meaning of the oath taken by all health professionals in China when they start their medical education. The English translation of Qian’s essay is published as an appendix to the essay.

Just 400 days before she wrote the essay, Qian was a confident and ambitious student who was determined to study medicine against her father’s wishes. But when the coronavirus started to spread across the country and her father repeatedly asked her to volunteer in the COVID-19 response, she began to discover a “hidden corner” in herself. Qian had a series of excuses: she didn’t have enough medical training, she was afraid of getting infected, and she had online classes to attend. A month went by, and the sudden news of her grandfather’s death—from a delayed cancer diagnosis because he was afraid to seek care at the hospital for fear of COVID-19—brought another moment of reflection. If she had paid more attention to her grandparents’ health, would his illness have been diagnosed and treated earlier? The series of events made Qian see the fear and panic in the “hidden corner” of herself. But then she realised that front-line health professionals have these feelings too and have managed to overcome these emotional struggles to fulfil their responsibilities. Dr Yong Tao at Beijing Chaoyang Hospital returned to the clinic as soon as he recovered from being stabbed by an angry patient.² Dr Nanshan

Zhong, in his eighties, was one of the first to go to Wuhan and coordinate the epidemic response in January. These role models helped Qian understand what it means to be a physician—medical training is not only about acquiring clinical knowledge, but also about cultivating a state of mind that will allow her to embrace the sacrifice and love for humanity embedded in the oath.

The COVID-19 pandemic has motivated many high-school students in China to choose medical schools in the National College Entrance Examination.³ Public health and disease prevention have been given more weight in medical education in China with the COVID-19 pandemic; for instance, Tsinghua University launched its School of Public Health this year.⁴ The pandemic also brought attention to medical humanity education so that more medical students come to understand that, behind the advanced technologies, the core of medicine is humanity and clinical practice should be patient-centred.

By selecting Qian’s essay as the winner of the 2020 Wakley–Wu Lien Teh Prize, we hope to inspire the next generation of health workers and encourage reflections on the transition and reform of medical education in China. We hope you will enjoy reading her beautiful and honest writing too.

We declare no competing interests.

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