

QIAO YIDE

Vice Chairman and Secretary General of Shanghai Development Research Foundation

Qiao Yide

Thank you, Chairman. First of all, I have to say that I am not an expert on public health like other members of this panel. I guess I am the only Chinese here in-person at the WPC, so the organizers wanted to double my assignment.

Michel Kazatchkine, Special Advisor to the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, Senior Fellow at the Global Health Centre of the Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies in Geneva

There is a lot of responsibility on your shoulders.

Qiao Yide

As an observer, someone who has gone through the lockdown in China over the past three years, I would like to share my views on what is going on in China, the experience and the lessons that can be learned from China to deal with a future X disease or unknown virus. First, transparency should be the first principle of dealing with an unknown virus or X disease in the future. By this I mean giving an alert on the virus, gene sequence, evolution and the possible harms to human beings and all this information should be released to the public, government departments and the CDC on time. I understand there a controversy about whether the Chinese government has done enough on these areas, and I am honestly not in a position to make a judgement on the issue. However, there is one factor I wanted to raise here: a professor at Fudan University in Shanghai published the gene sequence on the Internet. That enabled other countries in the West to produce PCR testing material and a vaccine very quickly, which it is difficult to imagine could have been done without his release.

Second, the action should be taken quickly, I would like to say rapidity of action is very important and when local authorities find an unknown virus, they should immediately report it to national CDC, which should then report it to the WHO according to the procedure. I have to say that in the case of China, local government was a little bit slow about reporting cases quickly to the national CDC, and I guess that is the lesson we should take.

Third, physical separation and its extreme form, lockdown, is effective at the beginning to prevent the virus expanding. The earlier action is taken the more effective it will be and the smaller the scope could be. At the beginning of 2020, the Chinese government shutdown Wuhan City, which is the capital of Hubei province and that was a successful example that

helped China have fewer cases that year compared to other countries. It also helped China to become the only one of the large economies to have positive GDP growth in 2020.

Fourth, flexibility and sensitivity are necessary to deal with variations of a virus and different measures should be taken for different variations. A path to successful measures does not mean future success. They did a good job in China at the beginning but starting from this year, I think the Chinese government has been slow to react to Omicron. Omicron occurred in China in December last year, but it took at least several months at least to spread all over China, and the Chinese government should have understood the nature of Omicron. They should not have continued with the zero-Covid policy until recently. They lifted restrictions immediately in the past one or two weeks. That is fortunate for China and also for the Chinese people because for the past few months China has been through a very tough time, and the cost is very high with a slowdown of the economy. Now the policy has changed, and we will see what happens in the near future.

The last point is that public awareness on the virus or X disease is also very important. I came here a bit earlier due to the availability of flights and I met a staff member at Bank of China, here in the UAE and he told me about a very interesting case. His family including his parents, wife and two kids flew from Wuhan to Dubai on 16 January 2020. He read an article and knew that something had happened but did not know the details, but he was very smart and told all the family members to stay at home and not to go outside. However, later on, one by one some symptoms appeared. He sent his mother to the hospital here and the doctors checked her up but did not know what was going on here. They went home and the doctor, and the nurse came to their home at midnight to do a PCR test and they found a virus and the whole family was moved to the hospital for quarantine. He said to me that his family probably brought the virus to the UAE, but they never infected anyone here and that is a very good example.

Now, on what is happening in China, I guess the Chinese government should do more to help the public understand what is going on, otherwise it will create serious consequences and it might be that the infection tide will occur in China. I think that Chinese governments will start to do that. I will stop here.

Michel Kazatchkine,

Thank you very much, and thank you for emphasizing from the start how China made the sequence of the virus available very early on. If I remember correctly that was on 2 January 2020, that is within days of the first cases being reported to WHO. That has not been the case in the history of some other viruses, but this issue of sharing sequences is clearly one of the key issues in the ongoing negotiations of a new pandemic treaty at international level. Within the new field of health diplomacy there is a sub-field of genomic sequence sharing diplomacy nowadays.

Could you also say a few words about the current acceptance of the vaccine by people over the age of 60 or 65?

Qiao Yide

I guess you are right. Several East Asia countries had a similar lockdown at the beginning of 2020 but now they have moved to another model. It is interesting what is happening in Hong Kong because there is a close relationship in mainland China, but they finally changed the model. I have a good contact with a professor at the medical school at Hong Kong University and he shared his view of what was happening in Hong Kong. He told me that the Xinhua News Agency asked him to write a report to send to the central government of China. What I am trying to say is that what happened in other countries had some impact on the change in Chinese government zero-Covid policy on.