

Abstract

Objective: The development of health diplomacy started in the mid-nineteenth century when the whole world faced the threats to public health and has continued to thrive for more than one and a half centuries. Since Taiwan withdrew its membership in the United Nations, we have not been able to participate in the activities of the World Health Organization (WHO), which makes the governmental health diplomacy difficult. Health problems have become a more and more important basis of international interventions made by the WHO, the diplomatic breakthroughs achieved by Taiwan during the epidemic of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) were strong supports to this argument. Therefore, health diplomacy is an effective way to break through the diplomatic constraints currently encountered by our country. The objective of this project is to collect information on the organization and human resources of health diplomacy in the Southeastern Asian countries, identify their strength, and make discussions and recommendations on the organization and human resources of health diplomacy of Taiwan.

Methods: The current project lasts for one year. We first collected information on the organization and human resources of health diplomacy in the Southeastern Asian countries through homepages and websites and then gathered further information by communications through e-mail, regular mail, and telephone. After that, we made interviews with experts and held expert panel meetings to discuss the organization and human resources of health diplomacy of Taiwan and make recommendations.

Results: We found that the current state of health diplomacy of Taiwan is very unique amongst Southeastern Asian countries. The main activities related to health diplomacy of other countries are mostly medical humanity aids, few of them have focused on real diplomacy issues. We should promote the organization and human resources of health diplomacy beyond the context of humanity aids. Specifically, investigations and intelligence exchanges on disease epidemics, international health organization, public health, capacity building, and research and regulations of Chinese medicine are feasible focuses of actions.

Conclusions and Recommendations: The current state of health diplomacy of Taiwan is very unique, and we should promote the organization and human resources of health diplomacy beyond the context of humanity aids; specifically, investigations and intelligence exchanges on disease epidemics, international health organization, public health, capacity building, and research and regulations of Chinese medicine. While the Department of Health has established the "Bureau of International Cooperation," we are still in lack of the mechanisms for training personnel. Aggressive inter-department efforts should be taken to deal with this problem.

Keywords : health diplomacy ; construction of organization ; human resources