

Open letter in support of Chuan-Guo Xiao, M.D. from the International Academic Community

September 29, 2010

Mr. Zhu Chen, Minister
Ministry of Health
People's Republic of China

Mr. Peigen Li, President
Huazhong University of Science and Technology
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Minister Chen and President Li:

We have all had the pleasure of knowing Dr. Chuan-Guo Xiao for many years. He is an internationally respected surgeon-scientist who has made major advances in the development of neuroregeneration to restore voiding and bowel function. Dr. Xiao performed groundbreaking animal research in the United States, demonstrating that a motor nerve that innervates the leg can be used to reinnervate the bladder and bowel. This reinnervation allows for development of a reflex to initiate bladder function. The results of his studies were published in peer-reviewed journals and other scientists have replicated Xiao's findings confirming these results.

Dr. Xiao eventually took the courageous step of moving from animal research to human studies and began performing the rerouting procedure on patients with spinal cord injury and spina bifida in China. Neurogenic bladder is life threatening in China due to a lack of both antimuscarinics and intermittent catheterization and lessening the complications of neurogenic bladder would be considered a lifesaving success. Patients with neurogenic bladder and bowel suffer greatly and endure a host of issues such as urinary retention, incontinence, recurrent infections, renal insufficiency, fecal incontinence, constipation, and poor quality of life. For a procedure as complicated as nerve rerouting requiring nerve regeneration, one cannot expect normalization of bladder and bowel function to be the definition of success. What is important is that the benefits outweigh the risks of the procedure.

Dr. Xiao published his clinical results in peer-reviewed journals and was twice honored by the Jack Lapidus Essay Contest - one of the most respected international awards given to scientists who make major contributions to the field of neurourology. In 2008 he was named the Kelm Hjalmas Memorial Lecturer from the International Children's Continence Society for his scientific achievements. Many of us have traveled to China to examine patients treated by Dr. Xiao and/or have been trained by him in the nerve rerouting surgery he invented. Dr. Xiao is a very skilled surgeon who is passionate about patient care and works tirelessly to train physicians around the world in performing his nerve rerouting procedure.

In the United States, an independent and very rigorous pilot research trial was performed to test the safety and efficacy of this procedure. The one-year results were recently published in the Journal of Urology. At the 12-month follow-up visit, a cutaneous to bladder reflex was found in 7 of 9 spina bifida patients, confirming that rerouting does occur. This finding by itself is remarkable and Dr. Xiao should be commended. In addition, a number of patients demonstrated improvement in bladder and bowel function, which has continued to improve with longer patient follow-up. The 36-month results are currently being analyzed and will be reported in the near future. The pilot data was supportive of Dr. Xiao's procedure and now an NIH sponsored clinical trial is being conducted to further study lumbar to sacral nerve rerouting in spina bifida patients. In addition, similar procedures have been done worldwide with Dr. Xiao helping to mentor the surgeons at each site.

The Chinese people and government should be proud of Dr. Xiao for his dedication to his patients, his scientific achievements, and his willingness to train doctors around the world on how to perform his surgery. The international scientific community was shocked to hear of Dr. Xiao's arrest. Those of us who know Dr. Xiao well find it difficult to believe that he is involved in these attacks.

Dr. Xiao is a compassionate man who is respected worldwide for his integrity and his innovative scientific contributions to society. We implore the Chinese government and authorities to treat Dr. Xiao fairly and to protect his human rights as these charges are investigated. Please strongly consider Dr. Xiao's scientific and humanitarian contributions to the world as facts are gathered in this case.

Sincerely,

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