



TAN JIN/Xinhua  
Quarantine over: Ning Ning and her mother Wang Youhuan savour their first taste of freedom as they step outside their home in the Zaishuiyifang residential area in Shangchun District, Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang Province.

# Facing SARS fearlessly, scientifically

## Medical staff hold front line against the new, sometimes deadly disease

### Seeds of hope planted in isolated communities

By WANG LING  
China Daily staff

HANGZHOU: "Hey, congratulations! The isolation is over, and you are all safe now! Come on out!" With that loud declaration by a residential officer, the whole of Unit 1 building in Zaishuiyifang Residential Area was overwhelmed with joy. Ning Ning and her mother Wang Youhuan gave a 'V' for victory gesture after stepping out of their home.

After two-weeks of quarantine, 201 residents living in the unit became the first group to regain their freedom in the city, capital of East China's Zhejiang Province. No new case has been reported among this group since the first SARS case was found here on April 19.

"I know it won't be long. When those seeds break through the soil, it will be probably time for us to get out too and work and live under the wonderful sunshine!" said a resident in another SARS isolation area.

On May 2, in a symbolic gesture of solidarity, all the households in quarantine were given packs of flower seeds by the Flower and Bird Market in the west end of the city.

"The spring in Hangzhou is so beautiful that we want our friends in the isolation locations to enjoy it too," explained one of the managers from the market.

The flower seeds, with all kinds of wonderful names such as violet, sensitive plant, lavender, sunflower, dancing grass, have not only

been distributed to the residents in the quarantined buildings.

Thirteen days have passed since April 19, the very first day when SARS cases were identified in Hangzhou. Since then, about 1,208 people in 214 buildings in the city have been cut off from the outside world.

In the Zaishuiyifang, an isolation district, residents formed a "self-rescuing committee" to organize and co-ordinate all kinds of issues during this extraordinary period.

A woman, surname of Zhang, who lives in the building kept a record of their lives using her video camera. The film, after being shown on local television stations, had quite an impact on the general public, for it not only recalled the details of life for those in isolation, it captured their unity.

"It is true. It is the isolation itself that has turned us, some 200 residents here, from total strangers to a united group, everyone being willing to help each other," said Zhang.

"At first, we could not get used to it, for we all have lots of things to do at work," said Fang Qing, an anchor woman at the provincial radio station. "Fortunately, with the help of the people outside, we have now figured out a special way of living here. My husband, working for a company, deals with his work by telephone everyday, and his colleagues at work are helping a lot," she said.

For her part Fang dispatches daily reports to her radio station concerning those interesting stories that happen around her. "By the way, my cooking technique has improved a lot these days," she quipped.

In order to ensure the safety of the residents living both in and outside the quarantined buildings, thousands of security guards and servicemen in those districts have also had to work day and night.

In the Shuangling residential area, there is an old and shabby long bench that is never empty. For 12 hours a shift, Wang Shaopeng and his two colleagues, the security guards of the residential area, have remained at their posts, on that bench. Their job is "simple" — sit on the bench and make sure no one goes in or out. Residents said that they were deeply moved to find one morning Wang still at his post following a night of heavy rain.

Hu Lanzheng, 40, is the president of the Jinjiang Community Women's Federation. With one of the buildings in her community isolated, she took on the task of doing the shopping for her quarantined neighbours.

It was not an easy job, as the building has 80 households, each with differing requirements. Hu has been working a 14 hour day, from 6 o'clock in the morning until 8 pm at night.

As the spring days get warmer and warmer in the city, more and more quarantined buildings have been given the all clear and no new cases have been found, unlike the very first few days when SARS cases were being detected. People are at last beginning to get on with their normal lives in the city.

**Editor's note:** The severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic has affected the lives of many Chinese people, with some quarantined for a certain period.

China Daily staff reporters in Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou interviewed several of them to find out how they cope with the epidemic.

By YU NAN  
China Daily staff

Wearing a surgical mask, Sun Ningying, thin and pallid, adeptly tapped out an e-mail on a computer. She had to stop frequently to answer the telephone calls that poured into the nearby line.

As director with the Department of Hypertension and vice-director with the Department of Cardiology at the People's Hospital of Peking University, she seems more familiar with working with medical facilities than with print and fax machines.

The People's Hospital was one of the first areas quarantined in Beijing's fight to contain the spread of SARS in the capital. It was cordoned off on April 24, soon after all their SARS patients had been transferred to specially designated hospitals. It was quarantined after 93 of its doctors and nurses were infected by patients.

"No one has yet died of SARS, but two of them, both elderly and excellent doctors who were infected at work, are on the danger list," Sun said in an exclusive interview with China Daily from her temporary office.

At the time the quarantine was implemented, 707 doctors and nurses and 302 patients, were in the hospital.

Some 1,600 or so doctors, nurses and other employees at the hospital, together with their family members, have been ordered to stay at home for observation.

charge of all the daily work outside the hos-



YU NAN/China Daily  
Sun Ningying, director with the Department of Hypertension at the People's Hospital of Peking University.

pital to help her colleagues inside the quarantine zone. Her temporary office is located in the Peking University Health Science Centre.

Sun and her team of eight have an enormous task. They collect and update daily health information of all the people not quarantined within the hospital. Daily temperature checks and the health status of each are relayed to Sun and her assistants via telephone, e-mail and fax for logging.

"If any of them gets a fever, I will be immediately informed."

Sun also co-ordinates the special stipend and materials for those doctors and nurses



ZHANG WEI/China Daily  
For luck: A little girl helps tying a lucky Chinese red knot outside the People's Hospital of Peking University in the centre of Beijing. Residents began to hang the knots, a traditional Chinese symbol of good fortune, to cheer the doctors, nurses and patients quarantined inside the hospital.

taken ill, helps the communicate with other units, and organize procedures for treatment hospital.

"The battle against SARS is still going on," she said, "and we are fighting on the second

#### Learning curve

Sun was not quarantined because prior to April 24th, she had been involved in the front-line battle against SARS. Leading a group of doctors and nurses at work in Beijing

from her own hospital. She had been at Ditan or a week.

Her memory of the weeks before the quarantine are still fresh.

Hers was the earliest group of doctors to treat SARS patients when the first case was diagnosed in the People's Hospital in early April.

She admitted that in the early days, the hospital did not institute appropriate protection, quarantine and disinfection routines that are standard for those hospitals specializing in infectious diseases.

"This was the main reason why so many doctors and nurses were infected," she said.

As a comprehensive hospital in the centre of Beijing, the People's Hospital every day treats hundreds of patients from all over the country for a variety of ailments. But as a general medical facility, the doctors and nurses lack the special experience and knowledge necessary when treating highly contagious diseases, explained Sun.

It was only after patients, doctors and nurses were infected one by one that the hospital management realized that the SARS virus needed special handling.

The hospital tried every means to curb the cross-infection by isolating the SARS patients. Doctors and nurses started to wear two layers of gauze masks and disposable medical protection outfits.

But even those measures were not carried out as strictly or properly as she was later to learn in Ditan Hospital, a specialized hospital for infectious diseases, were necessary.

"There I learned what real quarantine and disinfection are," she said.

All the doctors and nurses at Ditan have to wear three layers



ZHANG WEI/China Daily  
Residents help tying a lucky Chinese red knot outside the People's Hospital of Peking University in the centre of Beijing. Residents began to hang the knots, a traditional Chinese symbol of good fortune, to cheer the doctors, nurses and patients quarantined inside the hospital.

of special protective out-

fits, gloves, and several gauze masks. The quarantine areas and safe areas are strictly separated by several doors.

"There are strict and precise rules in those specialized infectious-disease hospitals for each action, such as where to change and put clothes and where to get disinfected from head to toe so that no one will bring any virus out when he or she leaves the quarantine area," explained Sun.

The team of five doctors and 15 nurses she headed at Ditan Hospital have remained in good health even though they

procedures and practices in place in specialized hospitals should be made known to all doctors and nurses and, when necessary, adopted, thereby affording the maximum protection to both health professionals and the public they serve.

#### Devotion

Despite an initial lack of knowledge and experience, Sun said her colleagues have performed their duties in an exemplary fashion.

"Even though my colleagues became ill one by one, no one ever thought about withdrawing in this battle and some even continued to voluntarily join in it," she recalled.

One such example was Sun Yan, one of the two doctors who remains on the danger list.

Sun, 55, is Director with the Department of Hepatitis. He was infected with the SARS virus when making an emergency rescue.

"He knew that it would be dangerous if he did so, but he did it because he is a doctor first and foremost," Sun Ningying said, her voice breaking.

She also recalled, Cui Shuxian, the head nurse with the Department of Hypertension, who volunteered to join the SARS treatment group.

"Her baby is just a few months old," said Sun. "She was also infected and is now in Ditan Hospital."

"Many people ask me why we doctors stick to our jobs even facing the danger of death. I reply by asking them a question: 'Should a soldier step forward or back off when facing a battle?'"

"This is a battle that tests our professional spirits as doctors and nurses, and we are defending our honour with the work we've done and will continue to do."

#### On the second front

Now engaged on the second front, Sun also ensures that she and her colleagues perform their duties to their utmost.

Informed by e-mails and telephone calls every day, Sun said the entire hospital is under a strict regime of observation, quarantine and disinfection.

Training classes and lectures on how to deal with the contagious disease are being held through the medium of television and the telephone.

The former inpatients, who are not infected with SARS, are also being taken good care of, she added.

The hospital will be discharged from quarantine on May 8 if no new cases of SARS appear.

Sun looks really tired, her voice is husky, but her eyes shine with resolution.

She ought to be on holiday after completing her work at Ditan Hospital. The Beijing Municipal Government stipulates in a circular that doctors and nurses who have attended SARS patients for two weeks are entitled to a 10-day break.

But as director of the Disciplinary Committee with the People's Hospital, Sun found herself the highest ranking doctor outside the hospital at the time the quarantine came into force.

After undergoing careful medical checks, Sun took up her new post. She believes she is safe to continue working.

"It has been more than 20 days since I first came in close contact with SARS patients, and if I were infected, I would have been ill by now," she said.

She is busy with updating reports co-ordinating and communicating work around the clock, with only 5-6 hours rest a day. Sometimes, there are emergency meetings held at midnight. Other nights she simply is unable to sleep, and has to get up the next day to face the work that still awaits her.

"I never lost confidence and hope, she said. "I, all along, have believed that we people can win the battle against the virus."

She is also encouraged and has been immensely comforted by the hundreds of messages of best wishes, calls and e-mails she has received from friends, relatives and students.

While working at Ditan Hospital, she tried to talk, comfort and encourage the patients as much as she could, so as to increase their confidence in defeating the virus.

"Without a firm and confident mind myself, I could not do the job," she added.

Sun has not been home for more than 20 days, because of the demanding workload and out of concern for the safety of her family and neighbours.

And with her cleaning lady having returned to her own home, she expects her apartment "is definitely a mess now because my husband never knows how to do housework," she said.

What Sun hopes for is greater understanding and support from society. She said hospital staff, doctors and nurses have encountered different levels of discrimination from within the communities they live in and from the schools where their children study.

Before the Municipal Education Bureau ordered the closure of schools on April 24, "some of my colleagues told me that their children had not been able to go to school after the teacher found one of their parents was from our hospital," said Sun.

"We all understand that it is a common reaction for people to want to protect themselves. But the children have to be well-educated while their parents are working on the frontline."

## Battle against virus staged at grass roots level

By YAO LAN  
China Daily staff

SHANGHAI: Lu Gendi, a 50-year-old laid-off worker, started a new job on April 27, as a community cleaner.

But the role of Lu and her colleagues is different from the normal army of Shanghai's street cleaners. Their task is to disinfect residential quarters in the Square Community, located in the heart of the city.

It is the first community cleaning service team set up in the city to combat SARS.

"It was a joy to get employed again," said Lu. "But, more importantly, I can make my contribution to the prevention of SARS."

The 20-member team will daily sterilize corridors and every nook and cranny in their allocated apartment buildings.

As required by newly enacted regulations, each residential community will set up similar teams to carry out such work. Each neighbourhood will also have a disinfection

group consisting of four to six members.

While many sectors in the city have geared up to fight the potentially fatal flu-like SARS virus, all communities have been mobilized to establish networks among millions of households.

Education is one of the most important tasks community workers encounter. Daning to the suburbs, has nine large construction sites and three vegetable markets, coupled with a large migrant population, all of which pose considerable challenges to effective preventative work.

To make sure everyone is well-informed about the illness, how best to prevent it and its symptoms, staff from the community, neighbourhood committees, and even residents from local apartment buildings have all joined in the campaign across to every migrant worker.

The community staff have visited each con-

struction site to show workers the correct way to wash viruses off their hands.

Caoyang Community, with a population of around 100,000 people, have 20 neighbourhood committees. Its 200-odd volunteers have been handing out pamphlets to businesses and households.

"In order not to miss any one, we did not put the little sheets into mailboxes of each household, but sent them to residents in person," said Xu Xuemei, head of the Public Health Department of the community.

"As for the elderly with poor sight or who cannot read, we explained to them how to protect themselves."

Qin Liju, deputy-head of the Caoyang Community, recalled getting a tip in mid-April about a woman resident surnamed Pan who had had close contact with a suspected SARS patient.

The moment she was alerted Qin and her colleagues began a race against time, pulling out all the stops to properly iden-

tify the woman.

"We had to fish for her in such a populated city," said Qin.

There was no one registered by that name in the community and the neighbourhood police had no helpful information.

Their first lead came from Shanghai's Public Security Bureau's residency files which had a record of a woman of that name and description registered as living in another district.

The woman's parents were contacted and neighbourhood workers finally traced her at around 9 pm that same day. It was almost midnight when they finished their disinfection and quarantine work.

During the observation period, community doctors visited the woman and took her temperature every day, while community workers made daily calls to reassure her and help with day to day necessities.

Her quarantine period ended last week and she was given a clean bill of health.