

Some reflections on FHS at IHEA World Congress 2009 in Beijing by David Peters, Director of the FHS research programme consortium

“The IHEA conference has been very stimulating. There were many interesting and relevant presentations from both senior statesmen and rising stars, and it was great to see so many old friends, and to meet new ones. The China Health Economics Institute was a superb host to over 2000 participants at the conference - they were both welcoming and efficient. Xiao Yue and our communications team also ensured that we had our work prominently displayed and distributed. The Future Health Systems consortium had a large presence at the conference, with numerous presentations, posters, and discussions. I am particularly pleased by work presented by a large numbers of junior researchers and students from the FHS consortium presenting at the conference.

There were many interesting discussions and debates, some exploring models for health systems around the world, some focused on the vast challenges faced by China, and many looking at specific problems in settings in various countries. The work done by FHS appears to be at the cutting edge of thinking, and of policy relevance in developing countries. In several sessions, people were looking to ways to address problems of accountability and trust, and how to measure and use assessments of quality of care, or how to improve equity in health systems - all areas where FHS is making important contributions. Several other groups are experimenting with similar, such as the use of demand and supply- side interventions to increase safe deliveries. One of the lessons from these studies was the over-riding importance of being able to focus on the implementation and accountability of schemes, factors that we have stressed in our work. The IHEA pre-session on the private sector was a good opportunity to look at how unregulated health markets are an important issue in many developing countries. Many researchers are asking questions about "what works" in the private sector, and the FHS team has been complementing these questions by exploring how these markets work and can be influenced, and how to understand and deal with important local institutions to benefit disadvantaged people. We hope to be able to follow up at the next IHEA conference in two years time, with Gerry playing a role in organizing the work on private health markets in developing countries.”