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The Chinese doctor who tried to warn others about coronavirus

By Stephanie Hegarty

Population Correspondent

🕒 6 February 2020

Coronavirus pandemic



Dr Li Wenliang, who was hailed a hero for raising the alarm about the coronavirus in the early days of the outbreak, has died of the infection.

His death was confirmed by the Wuhan hospital where he worked and was being treated, **following conflicting reports about his condition on state media.**

Dr Li, 34, tried to send a message to fellow medics about the outbreak at the end of December. Three days later police paid him a visit and told him to stop. He returned to work

and caught the virus from a patient. He had been in hospital for at least three weeks.

He posted his story from his hospital bed last month on social media site Weibo.

"Hello everyone, this is Li Wenliang, an ophthalmologist at Wuhan Central Hospital," the post begins.

It was a stunning insight into the botched response by local authorities in Wuhan in the early weeks of the coronavirus outbreak.

Dr Li was working at the centre of the outbreak in December when he noticed seven cases of a virus that he thought looked like Sars - the virus that led to a global epidemic in 2003. The cases were thought to come from the Huanan Seafood market in Wuhan and the patients were in quarantine in his hospital.

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On 30 December he sent a message to fellow doctors in a chat group warning them about the outbreak and advising they wear protective clothing to avoid infection.

What Dr Li didn't know then was that the disease that had been discovered was an entirely new coronavirus.



Four days later he was summoned to the Public Security Bureau where he was told to sign a letter. In the letter he was accused of "making false comments" that had "severely disturbed the social order".

"We solemnly warn you: If you keep being stubborn, with such impertinence, and continue this illegal activity, you will be brought to justice - is that understood?" Underneath in Dr Li's handwriting is written: "Yes, I do."

He was one of eight people who police said were being investigated for "spreading rumours".

At the end of January, Dr Li published a copy of the letter on Weibo and explained what had happened. In the meantime, local authorities had apologised to him but that apology came too late.

For the first few weeks of January officials in Wuhan were insisting that only those who came into contact with infected animals could catch the virus. No guidance was issued to protect doctors.

But just a week after his visit from the police, Dr Li was treating a woman with glaucoma. He didn't know that she had been infected with the new coronavirus.

武汉市公安局 武昌分局 中南路街道派出所
训 诫 书

武公(中)字(20200103)

被训诫人 李文亮 性别 男 出身年月 _____
身份证号各类及号码 _____
现住址(户籍所在地) 武汉市 _____
工作单位 武汉市中心医院

违法行为(时间、地点、参与人、人数、反映何问题、后果等)
2019年12月30日在微信群“_____”发表有关华南海鲜市场确诊7例SARS的不真实的言论。

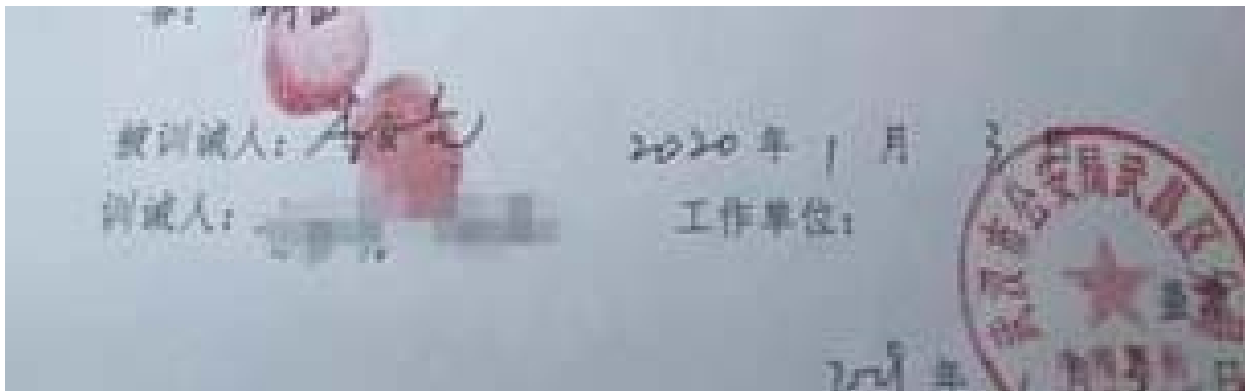
现在依法对你在互联网上发表不真实的言论的违法问题提出警告和训诫。你的行为严重扰乱了社会秩序。你的行为已超出了法律所允许的范围，违反了《中华人民共和国治安管理处罚法》的有关规定，是一种违法行为！

公安机关希望你积极配合工作，听从民警的规劝，至此中止违法行为，你能做到吗？

答： 能

我们希望你能冷静下来好好反思，并郑重告诫你：如果你固执己见，不思悔改，继续进行违法活动，你将会受到法律的制裁！你明白了吗？

LI WENLIANG



In his Weibo post he describes how on 10 January he started coughing, the next day he had a fever and two days later he was in hospital. His parents also fell ill and were taken to hospital.

It was 10 days later - on 20 January - that China declared the outbreak an emergency.

Dr Li says he was tested several times for coronavirus, all of them came back negative.





On 30 January he posted again: "Today nucleic acid testing came back with a positive result, the dust has settled, finally diagnosed."

He punctuated the short post with an emoji of a dog with its eyes rolled back, tongue hanging out.

Not surprisingly the post received thousands of comments and words of support.

"Dr Li Wenliang is a hero," one user said, worrying about what his story says about their country. "In the future, doctors will be more afraid to issue early warnings when they find signs of infectious diseases."

"A safer public health environment... requires tens of millions of Li Wenliang."

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