

# Editorial

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On 12 January 2022, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region announced a proposal to re-structure policy bureaux from 1 July 2022, the beginning of the new term of Government. The Food and Health Bureau was revamped to become the Health Bureau, which would focus on medical and health policies. Apart from the implementation of ongoing projects and policies, the re-structured policy body would ensure the sustainable development of the public healthcare system, particularly with regard to public health strategies, and support the development of industries, particularly in the areas of health technology, the research and development of drugs, and medical manpower. Many problems in the healthcare system are not new, and the urgent need to ensure adequate preparedness and appropriate responsiveness became obvious during the recent pandemic.

Healthcare systems are complex, consisting of numerous dynamic interactions involving organizational structures, specific tasks, technology, and professionals and supporting people in physical, artificial, social, and cultural environments, and responding to uncontrollable external factors. Change in one part can lead to unexpected effects elsewhere, and to unpredictable changes in different areas such as service demand, staff capacity and other resources, as well as conflicts between organizational goals and efficiency. Against this background and with the setting up of the “new” policy bureau in healthcare, this book was conceived and a proposal was made last year to publish it as part of a series to strengthen the knowledge

base and ideas for building a sustainable healthcare system for Hong Kong. This first volume consists of 11 chapters organized under three headings: Systems Review, Public Health Crisis, and Sustainable and Caring Services.

In part 1, some critical problems in healthcare are raised, such as a rising demand for healthcare services from the community, an increasingly ageing population, a shortage of healthcare workers, and other problems. There is a rethinking of the concept of primary healthcare, with reference to the “Primary Healthcare Blueprint” released in December 2022, containing a critique of the development of such a care system in Hong Kong, as well as a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the current strategy amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Another aim in the chapters is to identify gaps in primary healthcare, with community health as a strong focus in healthcare delivery. District health centres (DHCs) and expresses have been established in all 18 districts since September 2019. The DHC is a focus of discussion in a review of systems to achieve sustainability. The chapter focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of the new policy on implementing the DHC model in Hong Kong, and reviews what Hong Kong can learn from the good primary healthcare practices of New Zealand. Recommendations are given on how to address the need to demonstrate a successful model of a sustainable health system in Hong Kong led by primary healthcare. The authors of part 1 argue that a social model of health that considers broader impacts on health and emphasizes collective and social responsibility for health is needed. They offer several recommendations on strengthening the healthcare system, including providing professional training for healthcare staff, the specialization of nursing services, and policy-driven approaches to healthcare financing and regulation for health professionals. They also suggest that medical-society collaboration on the social determinants of health problems may be a useful approach to addressing the shortcomings of the current system. Overall, this chapter highlights the need for a more holistic view of healthcare in Hong Kong that goes beyond medical treatment to address the social determinants of health and promote collective responsibility for health.

Attention is drawn to the need to pull together resources given the importance of social-medical cooperation, public-private collaboration, and the emergency response system. In part 2, important health issues and crises are mentioned, with reference to the SARS and COVID-19 pandemics. Some good examples are introduced with the view that there is a need to demonstrate a successful and sustainable healthcare model in Hong Kong. The authors evaluate the strategic performance of the local healthcare system during the COVID-19 pandemic to allow for a better understanding of it. They propose possible suggestions for reforms in the future, using interdisciplinary approaches to create evidence-based models of disaster policies and a management approach with collaborative and consensual measures solicited from all parties concerned, including health professionals, policymakers, urban planners, and others.

In part 3, some innovative solutions, such the use of technology and blockchain for sustainable healthcare, are described. A special chapter cites the sustainable consumption of meat as one of the longer-term healthcare issues in Hong Kong. In reviewing the effectiveness of the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme in Hong Kong, attempts are made to borrow experiences from countries in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region, based on the principle of “money follows the patient”. The Scheme is one of the strategies for promoting a sustainable system led by primary healthcare. In addition, recommendations for collaboration with the Greater Bay Area will lead to cross-border and potentially international partnerships in the delivery of healthcare to both local and non-local communities.

The last chapter on compassionate care in the context of Hong Kong points to the need to make a number of changes in the local healthcare system, in a situation where compassionate care has not been a topic attracting much attention from those in the healthcare field and academic disciplines. Hence, the authors share some initial thoughts on improving the provision of compassionate care. They suggest that the keyword to the successful practice of compassionate care in Hong Kong is “heart”, which is the key to building a sustainable healthcare system for Hong Kong.

The Policy Forum organized by The Hong Kong Institute of

Asia-Pacific Studies of The Chinese University of Hong Kong on 28 and 29 July 2023 with the title of the new book as the theme is an initial step to arousing the interest of academics and professionals from and outside the healthcare sector in the provision of healthcare in Hong Kong. We look forward to building a sustainable system in the delivery of quality and equitable care to the happy and healthy community of Hong Kong.

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