

Response to the Healthcare Reform

I do not think the supplementary financing will work because:

1. With so much money in the market, private consultation fees will go up.
2. The expansion of a private healthcare market will lead to a loss of experienced doctors.

As a result, salary will be forced up in order to retain staff in the public health services. On the other hand, the insurance may not be able to cover the expensive private health service, driving users back to the public health services. Finally, the reform will not meet the objective to provide good flexible service to the users; it will not relieve the burden of the public health services. Users do not benefit by paying extra. The only people who benefit from supplementary financing are the doctors and the financial managers of the fund.

Therefore, measures to tackle these problems must be incorporated in the reform. It is useless just to say “there will be more room for collaboration between the public and private sectors....” In the consultation paper it says to “provide a mechanism for private doctors to practice in public hospitals”. How would this work if it is not mandatory? Besides, in a free market, I cannot see how the government can control consultation fee.

If the government has the determination and courage to reform the health policy, besides financial sourcing, it should do more to control medical spending. I suggest:

1. Allowed overseas and/or mainland doctors to practice in Hong Kong.
2. In the face of a expanding market, doctors in private practice are required to offer their service at public hospitals/clinics

as their social responsibility. Users pay the same fees as they would in public hospital/clinics.

3. The government should set a guideline for private consultation charges.
4. Consultation charges should be available at the doctor's clinics. This will save users' time and money to shop around.
5. In the past, Chinese Medicine had always been a cheap and acceptable form of treatment. It should be promoted and made accessible to patients with chronic illnesses and the elderly.
6. In order to avoid the same mistake as the MPF, the government should incorporate in the consultation paper the % of administrative cost of the health fund.
7. "Our health expenditure will grow at a much faster rate than our economic growth", it is not realistic to pursue endlessly all the latest advance medical technology. This is a big ethical issue and cannot be evaded if the government is determined to reform our healthcare system.

Submitted by:
Lee Lak See (Ms)

Note: All quotations come from Your Health Your Life, the health care reform consultation paper (2008) by the Food and Health Bureau, HKSAR.