



Tony Nelson

13/06/2008 16:41

To beStrong@fhb.gov.hk

cc

bcc

Subject Public Consultation on Health Care Reform

Urgent Return receipt Sign Encrypt

Dr York Chow
Food and Health Bureau
19/F Murray Building
Garden Road
Central, Hong Kong
Fax: (852) 2102 2525

Dear Dr Chow

Thanks for inviting us to give our views in this consultation.

"Hong Kong People Among the Healthiest in the World" - If the system is not broken, please lets not try to fix it by destroying Hong Kong's excellent public health system!

Yes health care costs are going up and Yes, like all developed countries, Hong Kong has an aging population.

The consultation document suggests 6 options to meet these increasing demands:

- . Social Health Insurance = ? another form of taxation
- . Out-of-pocket Payments = OK for those wishing to use private sector
- . Medical Savings Accounts = another form of taxation
- . Voluntary Health Insurance = OK for those wanting to use private sector
- . Mandatory Health Insurance = another form of taxation
- . Personal Healthcare Reserve = another form of taxation

Please let me suggest a simple 7th option which the document has dismissed as "not a sustainable option". If society wishes to have more expensive health care and, if more resources are needed, then the most cost-effective option is to continue the present system and increase tax (as noted above many of the other options are just a more costly form of tax). If society doesn't want to pay more tax (or if they don't want to increase the slice of the tax pie for health), then they must accept a more basic level of public health care.

I would like us to consider some key facts.

1. For the same level of service, private health care will generally be more expensive than equivalent publicly funded health care
2. Private health care is often more responsive to patient needs and is seen as more efficient, but this comes at a higher cost
3. Private health care is not good for equity (see comment below about US healthcare) or for important "public health" programmes e.g. universal immunisation programmes
4. Savings scheme/insurance are just another form of tax - it is still money that comes out of our pockets.
5. Hong Kong currently has a great publicly funded government health care system.
6. If society wants more expensive health care interventions and more treatments for our aging populations, then we must be prepared to pay more tax (this will still provide more dollar-for-dollar health care

than paying into health care insurance and/or savings schemes to obtain this care from the private sector)
7. For those people who want the greater efficiency of the private system they can continue, as they are doing now, and either pay out-of-pocket or obtain health insurance.

For Hong Kong people, who have not already done so, I would highly recommend that they view Micheal Moore's movie "Sicko". I think this should be compulsory viewing prior to us making any decision on health care reform! We need to be very clear in our minds what we don't want - we definitely don't want a health care system like the US that is dominated by privately funded insurance companies and HMOs!

I would also like to suggest a recent book by Muhammad Yunus, winner of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize. The book titled "Creating a World without poverty: social business and the future of capitalism" details the concept of a social business model and how this could also provide health care services. This is in contrast to the "profit maximising business" models of the US-based health care system and insurance companies. This social business model might also be something that the government could consider exploring, to ensure that health care remains equitable and at the lowest cost for reasonable service.

Please let me know if you would like any clarification on these points.

Best wishes

Tony Nelson
Professor in Paediatrics
The Chinese University of Hong Kong