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THE PRACTISING PHARMACISTS ASSOCIATION OF HONG KONG

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Views on Healthcare Reform Consultation Document (March 2008), The Practising Pharmacists Association of Hong Kong

1. The background, vision and mission of The Practising Pharmacists Association of Hong Kong

The Practising Pharmacists Association of Hong Kong was established in 1972 as a professional body made up of registered pharmacists with an aim to collate the efforts of pharmacists to serve the community in which we live in. The Vision of the PPAHK is "To Make Hong Kong A Better Place" by striving for pharmacy excellence with innovative, high quality, and patient-centered pharmaceutical care services. The PPAHK embraces our values of Service, Professionalism, and Teamwork.

For the past three decades, we have been working with community partners to provide free public health education seminars, drug safety talks, and drug counseling sessions to the general public in an effort to achieve our vision "To Make Hong Kong A Better Place".

2. The background of Community Pharmacy in Hong Kong

With the majority of our professional members performing their professional role in the community pharmacies across Hong Kong, there is an established network of pharmacies that provide convenience and accessibility to the general public. The public of Hong Kong can seek the professional advice and services of professional pharmacists for an array of needs free of charge. At the current moment, this free service is not fully utilized and the public is deprived of the essential services for healthy living. It is the intent of this proposal document to make feasible and useful suggestions to maximize the readily available resources of the professional pharmacist to contribute to the successful reform of the Hong Kong healthcare system.

3. Hong Kong healthcare system in need for imminent change

Ineffective utilization of resources

With the current imbalance between the private and public sector of the healthcare system, the pharmacy resources in the private sector are severely under-utilized. In view of the coming healthcare mega-challenges, there is no choice but to fully utilize the available resources in the private sector in an effort to provide the necessary pharmaceutical care services to the public. It is the role of the government of Hong Kong to provide the infrastructure and systems to facilitate the convenient access of cost-effective and high quality multi-disciplinary healthcare services to the public. The statement contained in the Healthcare Reform Consultation Paper on page 21 which states that the government will "encourage and facilitate medical professionals to collaborate with other professionals to provide coordinated services" forms the basis of this proposal.

4. What is the role of the pharmacist on the healthcare delivery chain?

Fundamental Roles and Functions of the Pharmacist

i. Essential partner for the safe and effective supply of medicines

In many developed countries across the world, there is a common principle that it is to the society's benefit that important functions such as the judicial system and healthcare system have a "Separation of Powers" to ensure fairness, transparency, and efficiency of the system. The fundamental role of the pharmacist, as a highly trained and skilled "Expert on Drugs", is to provide the important and necessary checks and balance mechanism, during the supply of medicines, to ensure the safe and effective use of drugs for the benefit of the patient. In the context of the aging population which will require the incremental use of medicines to maintain good health, a plan to provide for the basic right of the Hong Kong people to be provided with a drug supply system with proper checks and balance must be established.

ii. Key contributor to ensure patient compliance and achievement of outcomes

Drugs prescribed for patient use, by itself, cannot deliver the desired level of therapeutic outcomes without the appropriate level of patient counseling, by qualified and trained pharmacists, to educate the patient and their carers on the safe and effective use of the drug products. The pharmacist, as the expert on drugs, is the most

qualified person to provide the update and accurate drug information to medical professionals, patients and general public.

5. How can the pharmacist make significant improvements to the public's health?

I. Pharmacist's Role in Disease Prevention and Health Maintenance

The ultimate aim of the Healthcare Reform should be focused on efforts to protect and maintain the health of the Hong Kong people. When the public is able to live in a healthy condition for a longer period of time, healthcare costs will be minimized and well contained. One of the most important keys to health maintenance is through disease prevention. The pharmacist offers unique expertise in the use of preventative medicine.

On a macro level, disease prevention organizations such as the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in the United States employ pharmacists to identify public health risks from emerging diseases and make recommendations to protect the health of the population through the use of modern drug technologies for mass protection programs. It is highly urgent that the Center for Health Protection (CHP) of Hong Kong to establish a pharmacist team to provide the necessary expertise to identify health risks and to make the proper recommendations for drug-related disease protection programs.

On a patient level, community pharmacists are conveniently situated at the heart of the community to provide easy access to the citizens that live in the neighborhood. The PPAHK will take the lead to work with the government of Hong Kong to promote the wide utilization of the **"Neighborhood Pharmacy"** network to serve the diverse healthcare needs of the general public.

The "Neighborhood Pharmacy" for free healthcare advice

It is common practice in many developed countries to promote the use of "Neighborhood Pharmacies" as the first point of contact for patients seeking free healthcare advice.

The PPAHK will work with the government to initiate the promotion of the "Neighborhood Pharmacy" as the first point of contact for free healthcare advice. The professional pharmacist working at the "Neighborhood Pharmacy" is able to educate the public on a one-to-one basis on disease prevention and health

maintenance. With a strong professional team of nearly 500 "Neighborhood Pharmacists" across Hong Kong, important disease prevention and health maintenance advice can be disseminated rapidly and accurately to the public. As the health advice is provided free of charge, there is no additional costs incurred to the healthcare system.

To illustrate the benefits of the role of the "Neighborhood Pharmacist" in disease prevention, the following examples are for reference:

1) Outbreak of influenza in the community

On 4 March 2008, in response to reports of outbreaks of influenza within the community, the PPAHK activated an emergency response plan to co-ordinate nearly 500 "Neighborhood Pharmacists" to set up "Flu Information Stations" in the community pharmacies and to work with the Center of Health Protection (CHP) to provide the necessary information, guidance, and advice for the prevention and management of the flu outbreak for the general public in need of professional assistance. The emergency operation was highly successful as one of the means to provide an immediate support for the effective control of the health emergency situation.

2) Seasonal Disease Prevention

Disease prevention especially traveler's diseases such as diarrhea, skin cancer, malaria, dengue fever and Japanese encephalitis is necessary on a regular basis to protect the health of Hong Kong. Pharmacist can give advice on food hygiene, and drug treatment for diarrhea, sun-screening for minimizing of skin damage as a result of long exposure to UV light, the provision of insect repellents can help reduce the chance of mosquito bites therefore minimizing of malarial infection, dengue fever and Japanese encephalitis. It is important to highlight that in the UK, malaria prophylaxis drug therapy can be sold over-the-counter. Being provided to the clients on medicines usage and on traveler's disease prevention measures, before medicines are supplied, this further enhances the public health gain by means of raising public awareness on measures to disease prevention as well as convenient access to prophylaxis therapies.

To illustrate the role of the "Neighborhood Pharmacist" in Health Maintenance, the following examples are for reference:

1) Information for healthy lifestyle

Pharmacists are in a unique and favorable position to promote healthy lifestyle supporting balanced diet, smoking cessation, and regular exercise. Patients with chronic diseases would find the pharmacists in the neighborhood as the caring partners to provide the most up-to-date suggestions on lifestyle modifications, tips on disease management and information for self-monitoring devices (monitoring devices for blood pressure and blood glucose.)

2) Nutritional Supplementation

Numerous nutritional products are displayed on shelves in retail settings. The pharmacist is the only qualified person to guide the customers to the right product that fits their lifestyle through a "Need approach". In this approach, international guidelines are followed and special care is delivered to patients of special groups with the accurate and non-bias counseling.

3) Smoking Cessation

The pharmacist has been playing a key role in supporting smoking cessation campaign for the past few years. Patients can receive free consultation during the entire course of smoking cessation therapy from the pharmacists in neighborhood. Professional advice including the method of usage, precautions and reinforcement on compliance are the key to success of the Nicotine Replacement Therapy.

II. The "Neighborhood Pharmacist" Role in Advising on Simple Acute Illnesses

Across the world, the trend for self-medication is on a dramatic increase, the "Neighborhood Pharmacist" plays an active role in providing the necessary patient counseling, free of charge, for the treatment of minor illnesses with Over-the-Counter and Pharmacist Only (P1) categories of drugs, and also acting as an important "Point of Referral" when medical attention is required for more serious illnesses.

To illustrate the benefits of the "Neighborhood Pharmacist" in advising for self-medication, the following examples are for your reference:

1) Pharmacists take the role to cope with various minor ailments that share a part of workload in primary care level. Minor ailments such as constipation, cough and cold, pain, and skin problems can be dealt with by pharmacists who can also promote healthy lifestyle to the general public, while more complicated cases can be referred to family doctors who can also provide regular health check to patients.

2) In the peak season of flu, community pharmacies act as the points to provide OTC and preventive measures (mask and hygienic products). Pharmacists are in the key position to deliver the key messages and screen serious cases for referral to medical practitioners.

III. The "Neighborhood Pharmacist's" Role in Chronic Care

As the Hong Kong population is aging rapidly, the role of the "Neighborhood Pharmacist" is increasing in importance to provide the necessary monitoring and care for the elderly.

To illustrate the benefits of the "Neighborhood Pharmacist" in chronic care patients, the following examples are for reference:

1) Specialty Drug Clinics

Specialty Clinics including "Diabetic Clinics ", "Warfarin Clinics ", "Hypertension Clinic" , "Asthma Clinic" and "Pain Control" where close monitoring and counseling are required to manage the disease for a long period of time is best situated at the nearby "Neighborhood Pharmacy". Patients can build long term relationship with the pharmacists who can provide the optimal level of follow-up for the patients.

2) Monthly Drug Supply Model

In a model of monthly supply of chronic medicines supplied from the "Neighborhood Pharmacy", delivery services for immobile patients (eg: confined to institutions or old age homes) can minimize any inconvenience caused by the need to travel to remote hospitals for collecting medicines. The monthly drug supply model will facilitate the reduction of drug wastage, and improve monitoring. Many "Neighborhood Pharmacies" in developed countries provide services for preparing blister package or unit-dosing for elderly patients to achieve the higher standard of drug safety and convenience.

3) Use of Compliance aid for patients.

In promoting effective drug utilization, the impact on patients' quality of life, drug cost, and even hospitalization cost resulting from non-compliance should not be underestimated. Pharmacists are familiar in providing compliance aid, including tools and techniques, to the patients in need. It is recognized that there is a demand from patients and their caregivers that the drug compliance service is a necessary support, especially for patients with poor disease knowledge or impaired cognitive function.

IV. The "Neighborhood Pharmacist's" Role in Controlling Drug Costs

Drug cost control is a challenging topic in pharmacy management but pharmacists can usually generate a great impact. Drugs that duplicate irrationally are prone to drug induced adverse reactions which can be identified by pharmacists and properly intervened. Other drug cost control methods include drug utilization review, providing timely suggestions on cost-effective substitution, participation in formulary review and prescribing advices.

Pharmacists can also assist in limiting bulk supply to reduce drug wastage, while the easy access to "Neighborhood Pharmacies" to collect chronic medicines can help with drug wastage, in the mean time pharmacists will provide counseling and follow up with the progress of patients' medicines taking habits in order to reinforce and build compliance. Thus preventable adverse drug reactions due to improper use of medicines or overdose can be avoided and health outcomes improved, leading to the reduction of hospitalization costs.

V. The "Neighborhood Pharmacist's" Role in Family Doctor Primary Care Model

i. "Multi-disciplinary Collaboration Platform" for Family Doctor network

Development of family doctor as the core of primary care is the direction of the Hong Kong government. The "Neighborhood Pharmacists" acts as a complementary role to the "Family Doctor" to provide patient counseling to patients on the effective use of the prescribed drugs. Rational Drug Utilization Services including drug information, accurate dispensing, counter-checking, patient counseling, medication review and follow-up provided by pharmacists are valuable. The Hong Kong government need to establish a "**Collaboration Platform**" between family doctors and neighborhood

pharmacists, along with other health professionals, working as a team for providing comprehensive care to the public especially to those with chronic diseases.

ii. Subsidized program for sharing of workload from the public sector

In the proposal of patients being funded/co-pay for private services, the medications supply should also be subsidized. A mechanism for reimbursement should be established. Meanwhile, "Public patients" can utilize the private dispensing service when public outpatient prescriptions are dispensed in "Neighborhood Pharmacies" and reimbursed by the government. This arrangement can assist with the imbalance between the private and the public health services and serves to provide easy access to public.

6. Required Infrastructure for Future Healthcare System

i. Electronic record sharing

One of the barriers for public-private cooperation is the barrier of record sharing. It is understood that the one-way sharing of patient records in public hospitals to private medical practitioners is a pilot plan. However, it is recognized that all partners participating in the future public-private healthcare service will be the stakeholders and have the right to update the record. It should be the ultimate goal for development of future collaborations. Sharing electronic record can promote medication review, drug safety, and monitoring of drug therapy especially involving drugs with narrow therapeutics indexes which are prone to cause adverse reactions.

ii. Request for a separate and independent entity to monitor the quality and performance of health care services and authorities

Currently in Hong Kong, there has been no independent audit commission for quality and performance of healthcare services. Compared to UK, where quality of healthcare is treated as the top priority, an independent watch-dog called "Audit Commission" is established for surveillance of cost-value, efficiency and effectiveness of local public services to deliver better outcomes for the public. As a force for improvement, the commission work in partnership to assess local public services and make practical recommendations for promoting a better quality of life for people.

It is important to raise concern for the low levels of transparent measures for healthcare service terms, targets and performances in Hong Kong. There may also be the existence of conflict of interest between the public and the health service providers without an independent entity to set and audit the service terms, quality and performance standard.

In view of public safety and availability of quality health care services, adequately and safely targeted to public needs, the Audit Commission for Health Care Services should be founded for developing objective service terms and standards. The services performance should be assessed fairly with the patient benefits in mind. The audit report, recommendations and progress for services and performance improvement should be made transparent to public for consultation. Therefore, the public will have a better understanding to the services they receive and their expectation to excellent services performances.

The recommendations for Audit Commission for health care services and authorities

- i. Perform audits and set the standard of service provision by a separate monitoring entity (such as Audit Commission for Health Care Services and Authorities) so that the service performance can be assessed fairly and objectively and be reported to the public on service outcomes
- ii. Provide guidelines and directions of development according to the public needs
- iii. Review of scope of Healthcare services and drug formulary fairly and objectively and healthcare issues as needed
- iv. Review of service performances such as incidence of medical incidents, MRSA infections and their plan for improving the sub-standard performance
- v. Report on performance should be open and transparent to public

7. How PPAHK can contribute in Healthcare Reform

PPAHK and its members have the commitment to offer innovative ideas towards the creation of new systems for the improvement of the drug-supply model and other patient-centered services. We are eager to work together with the authority, medical professionals, NGOs and public to drive the changes necessary for a better Hong Kong. The PPAHK aims to:

- i. Provide suggestions to the Health and Medical Development Advisory Committee and its Working Group on Primary Health Care for service development

- ii. Support the development of Public-Private Interface
- iii. Suggest and facilitate the introduction of new service models

Method of contact

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