



The Hong Kong Paediatric Society

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Response to the 2008 Healthcare Reform Consultative Document (HRCO) of the Health and Food Bureau of the HKSAR Government By the Hong Kong Paediatric Society (HKPS)

The Hong Kong Paediatric Society strongly supports the need for health care reform in Hong Kong. The current health care system is on a collision course with increasing patient needs and economic reality. The combination of high costs, unsatisfactory quality and long waiting list in the public health care system has created anxiety and frustration for all parties including patients, doctors and other health care providers.

Rivalry is the most powerful force yet discovered for driving improvements in the quality and costs of products and services. The fundamental problem in the Hong Kong Health Care system is the unbalanced skew towards the public health care system and a lack of healthy competition between the private and public health care services.

We are disappointed in the recent Consultation Document on Health Care Reform which essentially only covers various models of supplementary health care financing. It fails to address any strategies or solutions to health care reform.

Moreover, the Consultation Document does not contain any recommendations regarding health care reform for children and those with special health care needs. It is essential that any health care reform does not adversely affect the rights and health care needs of our children and it is the Government's responsibility to ensure that cost will not be a barrier to health care for the children of Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong Paediatric Society believes that the following issues need to be addressed if Hong Kong wishes to have an improved but affordable health care system:

- We support the idea of mandatory health coverage but any financing or insurance scheme introduced will need to address the needs of our children.
- Children are our future and the Government can consider providing free medical service to all our children, irrespective of their parents' income.
- Providing free preventive child health services should remain the sole responsibility of the Government, although parents may opt for these services in the private sector. As insurance coverage widens, primary care and preventative care should also be extended to everyone, yielding major long-term cost savings.
- We strongly support the set-up of a Children's Hospital. Specialty hospitals that track and report their outcomes, demonstrate good results and use of evidence-based practices will drive significant value improvements in health care delivery.
- Innovation is fundamental to improving value. As learning accumulates, the value and cost of new therapies often improve dramatically, achieving better quality at lower costs. The current medical system however does not support innovations in health care, including advances in technology and equipment and the use of new drugs. The Government should take up the role to adopt and deploy initially higher-cost new procedures and treatments, at least during a transitional period. The superior value of innovation should be measured and regularly reviewed. The Government can consider setting up a special fund for innovations in health care to support the spread of promising clinical approaches including drugs, medical devices and services.
- Rehabilitation/recovery is part of care for every medical condition but this is often not addressed with adequate attention or resources. Currently there is a collection of chronically disabled and handicapped children receiving long-term care and taking up valuable resources in acute hospital settings. There is an urgent need for step-down facilities to accommodate these patients for better defined care. More efficient use of medical resources can be brought about by bridging the current service gap.
- The cost of mandatory health coverage can be moderated if health plans are required only to cover essential services and we suggest providing subsidies or vouchers for low-income individuals and families to buy into a plan. Subsidies should be based on a sliding scale where individuals pay what they can, rather than an all-or-nothing model.
- The public safety net should continue to provide an accessible public health

care service to low-income and under-privileged groups.

- The public health care system should only provide essential services and should minimize unnecessary duplication of services within its constituent hospitals.
- We support closer collaboration between the public and private health care systems to help alleviate the heavy burden of long waiting list for elective procedures or surgery in the public system. One suggestion is the introduction of health coupons to subsidize certain elective procedures or surgery to be done in the private sector. However this should be capped to a reasonable limit to prevent abuse of service. An alternative proposal is to ask private health care providers to set their own prices for service bundles (including physicians' fees and all other charges) and the bulk of patients waiting for elective procedures could be shifted to the private sector via a bidding system to bargain down costs.
- We are against the idea of raising income tax rates to supplement health care finance because the working population only represents a small proportion of the whole population and it is not reasonable to place such a heavy burden on a small group of people.
- Finally, it is difficult to improve a service without measuring results. Mandatory measurement and reporting of patient results is the single most important step in reforming the health care system.

While the vast majority of attention has been focused on the different options of supplementary health care financing, we believe that the structure of health care delivery is the most fundamental issue in health care reform. The Hong Kong Paediatric Society will work closely with the Government to safeguard the rights of our children and will fight to provide them with the best environment for growth and development.



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