



# THE HONG KONG GERIATRIC SOCIETY

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## ***Press Release***

### **Towards a Better Medical Care for the Elderly**

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In response to the recent debate in the Legislative Council meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup> November regarding the care for the elderly, the Hong Kong Geriatric Society expressed grave concern on the development of medical services for the elderly in Hong Kong and urges the Government to review the present medical service for the elderly.

The Society also strongly supports the reopening of the multi-disciplinary Central Committee on coordination of services for the elderly, which must include professional input from geriatricians.

The above findings were based on a study initiated in mid-1991 by the Hong Kong Geriatric Society, which formed a "Committee for the Study of Geriatric Service in Hong Kong".

The Committee, comprising representatives from all local geriatric units and teams at work in public hospitals, aims to seek improvements on the current medical service for the elderly in view of a population boom of elderly in the coming years.

#### **Service Demand**

The demand of medical service for the elderly in Hong Kong has been constantly increasing in the last 16 years since the establishment of the first Government Geriatric Unit at Princess Margaret Hospital in 1975. From 1975 to 1991, the elderly population aged 65 or above has expanded rapidly from 250,000 to 482,040, an increase of 93%; whereas those aged 75 or above has increased by 143% from 66,700 to 162,017. A recent study in Hong Kong has shown that elderly females and males aged over 65 accounted for half and one-third of hospital medical

admissions. The growth of the geriatric service in Hong Kong over these sixteen years has been modest in comparison, with the present provision of 758 geriatric beds and 210 day hospital places headed by 5 consultants and 1 senior lecturer. Out of a total of 35 public hospitals in Hong Kong, only 7 are provided with geriatric specialist service.

The Committee foresees continuous demands on medical services for the elderly and urges the Government to consider the following recommendations:

1. To reactivate the multi-disciplinary Central Coordinating Committee

The Committee welcomes the reopening of the multi-disciplinary Central Committee on coordination of services for the elderly and is glad to offer professional input. Integration and coordination of the present uncoordinated medical and social services for the elderly will definitely ensure effective and efficient use of resources.

2. Thorough review and rational planning needed

The current planning of service provision by the Government often adopts a “crisis-solving approach”, that is, to solve a problem when it comes. This cannot do with service for the elderly. The Committee thinks that the present medical service for the elderly in Hong Kong should be reviewed and rational planning based on demography and hospital bed utilization pattern should be conducted, taking into account the age and sex distribution of the hospital population.

3. Geriatric specialist service

Geriatric specialist service headed by consultant geriatric physician should be set up in all acute hospitals in Hong Kong to improve the medical care for all elderly patients admitted into hospitals. Experience overseas has demonstrated the success of a comprehensive geriatric service with reduction of inpatient stay and the proportion of inpatients requiring long-term care.

4. District-based committee

The Committee recommended that a district-based elderly service coordination

committee should be set up for integration of resources and services. Assessment of the dependency state of patients by geriatricians would ensure proper placement in homes, hostels, care and attention homes or infirmaries; thus reducing inefficient resource utilization due to misplacement.

#### 5. Preventive care program

Preventive health care program should be developed with involvement of geriatrician to advise the primary care physicians on preventive health care for the elderly.

The Committee will continue to probe into the whole issue of medical care for the elderly and present professional views to the government to the benefits of the elderly patients.

#### 6. Background on the Hong Kong Geriatric Society

The Hong Kong Geriatric Society, formed in 1981, is a professional body consisting of 100 doctors interested in the management of disease and disability occurring in elderly people. It has been very active in promoting medical care for the elderly.

#### 7. The Significance of Geriatric Medicine

Geriatric Medicine is a branch of Medicine dealing with the clinical, rehabilitative, psychological and social aspects of illnesses in the elderly.

The main difference of geriatric medicine from general medicine is its organizational approach to the provision of services and a holistic approach to patient care.

Whereas general medicine is able to provide management of medical conditions in either an acute medical ward or an outpatient clinic, geriatric medicine has an armamentarium of acute, rehabilitation and long-stay facilities, day hospitals, multi-disciplinary rehabilitation team and a close liaison with the community and social welfare service. They have a very important role of coordinating all health care needs of the elderly, which will hence reduce readmission into hospitals and prevent unnecessary institutionalization of the elderly.

Recognition of the special characteristics of the elderly patients by the Royal

College of Physicians and the Royal College of Nursing has prompted the universities and nursing schools to include geriatric medicine in the training of medical students and student nurses.

Committee for Study of Geriatric Service in Hong Kong  
The Hong Kong Geriatric Society

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