

主旨: Consultation
附件: Immediate needs of the elderly versus long.docx

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Immediate needs of the elderly versus long-term efforts to build an age-friendly city

1. Introduction

The consultation paper '*Thoughts for Hong Kong*' has drawn the public eye closer to the aging problem in Hong Kong. As shown in the latest population projection,¹ the growing number of old people will inevitably hinder economic growth in the territory. Adding to the anxiety is the fact that we do not seem to make preparations for the unexpectedly quick transition to the silver hair era. The projected high elderly dependency ratio of 549 in 2041² has raised in sharp relief the issue of whether our public and self-financed elderly care services will be able to meet the residential care, medical and emotional needs of the elderly. Unfortunately, the authors of the consultation paper do not seem to have a proper appreciation of these immediate needs. The topics of active aging, silver hair market and retirement on the mainland have stolen the limelight in the consultation paper. But some old people, who regard daily elderly care services as their core interests, may pay scant attention to the above topics. Failure to address these fundamental needs will undermine our long-term efforts to build an age-friendly environment in HK. I will discuss the residential care, medical and emotional needs of the elderly below.

2. Residential care needs

There is substantial concern that more and more old people can hardly rely on family members to take care of them at home. These frail elders are in need of residential care so that they can achieve an optimal level of independence and social participation through the nursing, personal care and social activities that are arranged.³ The growing number of frail elders has given rise to the concern that the demand for residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) will increase drastically in the next three decades. If the government does not have a long-term plan to increase subsidized residential care places, the resources allocated for RCHEs will be strained to the breaking point in the next ten years.

At present, the SAR government deserves credit for its commitment to providing quality community care services for the elderly in HK.⁴ But the drastic demographic

¹ Latest population projections show that by 2041, nearly one third of HK's population will be aged 65 or above.

² *Thoughts for Hong Kong*, October 2013, Annex 1

³ Y. H. Kwan, 'The HKSAR's Welfare Policy and Services for the Elderly,' in *The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in its First Decade* (HK: City University of HK Press, 2007), p. 575.

⁴ Community care services include home help, home nursing, health visiting, meals-on-wheels, hostels, and day care centres of varying kinds (Julia Tao, 'Growing Old in Hong Kong: Problems and Programmes,' in John Jones (ed.), *The Common Welfare: Hong Kong Social Services* (HK: The Chinese University Press, 1981), p. 110).

shift in the next three decades reminds us that the demand for community care services will soon enter a permanent upward spiral. There is little appreciation by the baby-boomers that self-financed elderly care services are no substitute for government-funded community care services. Our government should think outside the box of fiscal conservatism and formulate long-term plans to meet the increasing demand for community care services in our community. For the elderly, long-term care in residential care home and community support services, besides medical care, are essential.⁵

3. Medical needs

In view of the growing number of old people, the Hospital Authority should examine its manpower and ancillary services to ensure that the public healthcare system is sustainable. Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying promised to conduct a review during the 2012 Election Campaign.⁶ We do hope that the review will find effective means to improve the quality of elderly services and cut the waiting time for patients. Whatever financial constraints and manpower deficiency there are, more efforts should be made to strengthen our public healthcare sector in order to prepare ourselves for the silver hair era.

It is now an established mainstream view that financing healthcare should be a shared responsibility between the public and private sectors. But the reform of healthcare financing has been relegated to a lower priority over the years.⁷ Though the previous government planned to implement voluntary health insurance in 2015, many HK people remain skeptical about the feasibility of the plan. We hope the government will provide tax incentive to facilitate the implementation of the voluntary health insurance scheme. The insurance industry may offer diversified insurance plans for individuals who could afford better healthcare services.

4. Emotional needs of the elderly

Thought should also be given to the emotional problems confronted by the elderly. Limitations upon physical activities caused by the incapacities of age often causes increased loneliness, anxiety and depression.⁸ It is worthy of note that depressive symptoms are very common in Chinese elderly patients who receive home care services.⁹ Unlike their predecessor, the young in today's HK are either too busy or ill-equipped to cope with the emotional needs of their old parents. Generally

⁵ Grace Cheng, 'Review of the Health System,' in Joseph Cheng, *supra.*, p. 817.

⁶ *China Daily*, 25/10/2013.

⁷ *South China Morning Post Editorial*, 27/9/2012.

⁸ Julia Tao, *supra.*, p. 113.

⁹ Y.H. Kwan, *supra.*, p. 582..

speaking, old people have become less reliant on their children for emotional support. In particular, old people in RCHes have become emotionally attached to their social workers and caretakers. It is a moot point whether the community support services will remain sustainable in the next few decades.

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