



International Conference on Healthcare Reform
17 January 2009
Concluding Remarks by Mr Anthony Wu,
Chairman of the Bauhinia Foundation Research Centre

I'd like to thank all speakers, discussants and participants for contributing to our discussions today. I am pleased to note that today's Conference was attended by about 400 participants.

I am particularly pleased that we have had very useful, thorough and stimulating discussion on healthcare reform, a topic that will have far-reaching impact on the long-term development of Hong Kong. I believe this is also a topic that policymakers, academics and stakeholders in many parts of the world will have to address in the years to come.

We have indeed benefited a lot from our distinguished speakers and discussants, who have shared with us their insights and perspectives in different key issues – primary care, family medicine, public healthcare provision, health outcome as well as financing.

As I have said, healthcare reform is not just about financing. Service delivery is equally, if not more, important in reforming our healthcare system. For Hong Kong, what is needed at this juncture is more focused and informed deliberations.

There are many useful points brought up at today's Conference. To conclude our discussions, I think that the following points and guiding principles are crucial in considering our healthcare reform in future.

Primary healthcare plays a critically important role in serving the health needs of the community. If done properly, enhancing primary care can help improve population health and reduce the need for hospital services, which tend to be more costly. This requires a fundamental change in individual and Government behaviours. We are glad to note that the Government and the community at large are exploring ways to enhance primary care in Hong Kong. We look forward to seeing more deliberations on this important topic with a view to developing a clear policy to get things going forward.

Experiences in the UK and New Zealand, however, have suggested that equal weight should be given to health outcome. In particular, we need to assess, in more quantifiable ways, how health improvements can be attributed to primary care reform. In this regard, I believe the experiences of NHS and New Zealand should provide insights into the way forward for Hong Kong.

Healthcare financing – it is obvious that this is an issue we all have to tackle, sooner or later. Either this generation or our next generation will have to find a way out. This is especially so in the context of Hong Kong in view of our ageing population and the escalating medical costs resulting from the rapidly developing medical technology and new drugs.

Financing is a matter of choice among stakeholders having due regard to our fiscal position, tax base, coverage of health insurance and other relevant factors. Before a public consensus is reached, I think it is extremely important to continue to engage the stakeholders in informed discussions on this topic.

At the end of the day, healthcare reform should bring about real benefits and improve the quality of our healthcare for the people. The key is to develop a healthcare system that is sustainable, accessible and at the same time affordable.

Thank you once again for joining us today. We look forward to seeing you soon again on another occasion.

ENDS