

Plenary Session of the 2015 Hong Kong Pharmacy Conference held on 29 March 2015 – Pre Pharmacy Council Task Force

This year's final plenary session was devoted to examining the fundamental issues integral to establishing a pharmacy council in Hong Kong (HKPC). The HKPC shall be an independent statutory body of licensed pharmacists dedicated to setting and implementing professional standards of practice. The ultimate goal is to advance pharmacy practice for better therapeutic outcomes in patient care. A 22-member Pre-Pharmacy Council Task Force* with representation from all sectors of the pharmacy profession in Hong Kong was appointed by the Pharmacy Conference Committee in October 2014. The task force held 3 meetings before the conference to set the agenda for the plenary session. Ms. S.C. Chiang was named the session's moderator.

In her opening remarks, Mrs. Mary Cheng reminded everyone that the notion of a pharmacy council was explored on and off for almost three decades. The closest we were to the finishing line was in 1998. Regrettably, the bill to create the pharmacy council was derailed by a competing bill of a higher order of complexity that concerned the dissolution of the Urban Council. Now almost two decades later, when there are promising signs of support by government for establishing a pharmacy council, all eyes must be focused on upgrading pharmacy practice and elevating its professional stature in Hong Kong.

The second talk by Ms. Chiang on the current functions of the Pharmacy and Poisons Board (PPB) set the stage for the final talk on possible functions of the pharmacy council by Mr. William Chui. The model pharmacy council was synthesized following a meticulous study, as well as a lively discussion at the task force level, of the medical and nursing councils of Hong Kong as well as the General Pharmaceutical Council of the United Kingdom. The HKPC was envisaged to perform core as well as operational functions, 9 in total. Many of these 9 functions were intended to capture the PPB's existing role in ensuring the rigor of pharmacy education and practice. Consequently, the reconfigured PPB will be able to focus on the supply chain of pharmaceutical products, spanning manufacturers, wholesalers, and distributors, as relates to the assurance of drug product quality. The Drug Office will be able to spend more time on drug product registration, thereby making timely access to life-saving drug products by those needy patients a reality.

Mr. Chui's talk was followed by a session of invitees from various pharmacy sectors and then by an open session from the floor. The invitees were Ms. Iris Chang (community pharmacist), Mr. Philip Chiu (community chain pharmacist), Mr. William Chui (hospital pharmacist), Ms. Annette Chiu (pharmaceutical industry pharmacist), Mr. Michael Yim (pharmacist from the Department of Health), Dr. May Lam (HKU) and Mr. Allan Chan (consumer). They were asked to share their views of the pharmacy council as articulated by the task force. While the majority of the panelists supported the formation of the Pharmacy Council, Ms. Iris Chang felt there was no urgent need to establish the HKPC. A community pharmacist suggested a public forum be organized for the community pharmacists to understand more about the functions of the Pharmacy Council.

Establishing a pharmacy council is a powerful public statement of the coming of age of the pharmacy profession --- a healthcare profession that is ready to set high standards and self-regulate. The council serves as a bridge to other health related councils in our collective commitment to improve the efficiency of our health-care system. By not seizing this rare opportunity of external support and consensus among leaders in the pharmacy profession for establishing a pharmacy council, the pharmacy profession in Hong Kong will forever be relegated to be in the long shadow of the medical profession in Hong Kong. The pharmacy profession in Hong Kong has historically been underutilized and the public has therefore been underserved in drug utilization. By speaking out on pharmacist manpower and pharmaceutical care, the council is our only hope of making an impact in enhancing job satisfaction for pharmacists and the care we are capable of delivering.

Given the generally favorable sentiment for the pharmacy council at the plenary session, we hope that the Pre-Pharmacy Council Taskforce, to be led by CUHK and PSHK, will move forward in stride to establish the Pharmacy Council to the next phase. There are 5 strategic tasks in this phase, as follows:

- a. to sharpen the vision and mission statements of the proposed Pharmacy Council, to propose standard of pharmacist practice, and to discuss means to bring all pharmacists to meet those standards;
- b. to expand the breadth and depth of grassroots, peer to peer, and governmental support;
- c. to determine the optimal membership of the council, terms of reference, and by-laws;
- d. to determine the infrastructure, personnel, budget, and revenue streams required to launch and sustain the HK PC; and
- e. to establish teams and time-lines to execute the action plan as articulated above.

The preliminary plan was to have a report to the pharmacy community in Hong Kong by the time of the 2016 pharmacy conference with a final draft to the Food and Health Bureau for action by July 1, 2016. For additional information on the current phase, please refer to the presentation material at www.pharmacyconference.org before the 2016 Pharmacy Conference.

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