

Safe-guarding the Health of People— Activities of the Hong Kong Medical Association

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The Hong Kong Medical Association (HKMA) was established in 1920 as an independent non-government organization. It has a membership of 8,022, out of 11,249 doctors within a population of 7 million.

Through the conjoint efforts of members, partners, staff, and Council members, the HKMA has made significant progress in the betterment of medical and health services in Hong Kong from the twentieth century to the twenty-first.

The motto of the HKMA is “Safe-guarding the Health of People.”

The HKMA organizes activities to promote public health education and campaign for healthy lifestyles in the community. Furthermore, we uphold our professional autonomy through active participation in the practice of peer-group review and process of self-regulation by the governing body responsible for the setting of standards, implementation of regulations, and discipline of doctors. We also have a Duty Council Member Scheme to help members understand the ethical code and rules.

The HKMA has conducted surveys within the profession to collect the opinions of physicians regarding the health reform and healthcare financing proposed by the government, especially the pros and cons of mandatory medical insurance and medical savings. The HKMA has also met regularly with medical insurers to work on core elements of good medical insurance schemes.

The HKMA has been fighting to maintain the right of dispensing by physicians. In a public opinion poll carried out in 2007, 3/4 respondents objected to the separation of dispensing and consultation.

The HKMA published the Good Dispensing Manual, encouraging members and their staff to

keep themselves up-to-date with good dispensing methods and risk management. Dispensing errors occurred not only in the private sector but also in the public sector (i.e. the Hospital Authority), and not only by doctors but also by dispensers and pharmacists.

The HKMA cooperates with the Medical Protection Society (MPS) to assist doctors with medico-legal litigation. These disputes often cause immense stress and serious consequences for doctors. The secretariat of the HKMA helps members to contact the MPS. Soaring annual insurance premiums for doctors have become unbearable, and the HKMA is negotiating with the MPS and the government to devise ways to limit these burdens on doctors.

The HKMA has also begun to introduce mediation processes to resolve conflicts between doctors and patients and hopes this can reduce litigations.

In the private sector, doctors suffer from unscrupulous rental increases in public housing estates, which cause tremendous difficulties in running clinics. Private doctors are also troubled by medical groups and Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs) which place too much emphasis on the customer service, marketing, and commercial elements of medical practice but might erode professional autonomy. The HKMA has strived to persuade the government and the legislature to regulate HMOs and group practices, as well as to contain rental inflation and insurance-run clinics to ensure a level playing field for solo practitioners.

In the public sector, doctors suffer from long, inhuman working hours; a poor working environment; inadequate training; and low respect for professionalism from the government and the

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The author receiving a souvenir for having given a public health talk



The author being interviewed by a radio programme

public. Morale has been worsening and there has been a staff exodus from the Hospital Authority, resulting in the deterioration of service quality. Our members demonstrated and marched together to Government House, hoping to bring about a brighter future for our profession and the next generation. Working hours and training prospects improved slightly after lengthy battles, but more needs to be done.

The HKMA is concerned not only about medical issues, but also health-related issues in society, even though they might become politicized, such as the smoke cessation campaign, antismoking legislation, food nutrition labeling legislation, environmental protection, and clean air campaign.

The HKMA is even concerned with the election of the Government Chief Executive. We organized a number of forums to allow the candidates to meet members of our profession and conducted two surveys to collect the views of medical professions for reference by all Medical Sub-sector voters. Only through active participation could we ensure that the voice of the medical profession was heard.

To have our voice heard, the profession has to be united. The HKMA has organized many activities to promote fellowship and fraternity within the profession.

Last year, we were also engaged in fundraising activities for relief work following the devastating the Sichuan Earthquake on May 12th in Mainland China, including immediate appeals

for donations to assist in frontline rescue efforts and voluntary relief work. In October 2009, a conference organized by the HKMA and Chinese Medical Association will focus on “Rehabilitation after Disaster: Physical and Psychosocial.”

The HKMA issues monthly HKMA newsletters, monthly CME Bulletins, and bi-monthly Hong Kong Medical Journals. We are providers, organizing CME activities, as well as accreditors of CME activities. We have an on-line CME website as well as many cultural and sports activities for our members. In addition the HKMA has an orchestra, choir, singing group and band, and charitable foundation. The HKMA also has a theme song, “WE ARE CONCERNED,” which was written by the author of this article.

Lyrics/Music: Dr. Alvin Y.S. Chan

Give your heart to the medical profession
Give your life in dedication
Share your love and your hope
Share your faith in life
for good health
Our best we will try
We will work hand in hand
with the oath in our hearts
Make the practice a more human art
We will ask We will search
We'll excel, be alert
Serve the people of Hong Kong
Let us dream Let us learn
Let us strive to make the world go on better
We are concerned!