

The Health of the Elderly in Hong Kong

Edited by Shiu-kum Lam



Foreword by Rotary Club of Hong Kong Northwest

We are proud to have made a mountain out of a molehill.

One of the four avenues of service of every Rotary Club is community service. So when the directors of the Rotary Club of Hong Kong Northwest (the Club) took office at the start of the Rotary year on 1 July 1993 under the presidency of John M.K. Lei, they invited members of the Club to sponsor projects that would benefit the community.

At that time, health awareness was gaining popularity and importance. One proposal was for the Club to finance the cost of a general health check up for up to 500 underprivileged elderly persons.

John Cheng, one of the past presidents of the Club, had access to the services of a local laboratory, so it was proposed that the number of elderly persons be increased to 900.

Initially, blood samples would be taken and analyzed for a complete blood picture — liver and renal function, lipid profile, and fasting glucose count. However, one director of the Club, Dr. Steve Cheung, felt that an opportunity existed for further analysis as similar data is lacking. At the suggestion of Ng Wing Hong, the director responsible for community service, who is also a director of the Hong Kong Society for the Aged (SAGE), Professor Shiu-kum Lam of the Department of Medicine of Hong Kong University was approached to undertake further analysis of data.

As things developed, what started as a general health check-up project grew into a study of the health condition of the aged in Hong

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Kong with the objective of prevention of illnesses and improvement of health care.

An opening ceremony to mark the commencement of the project was held on 8 January 1994 and was officiated by the Chairman of SAGE and member of the Executive Council Professor the Hon. Edward Kwan-yiu Chan, District Governor of Rotary International District 3450 and member of the Legislative Council the Hon. Moses Mo-chi Cheng, Director of Medical and Health Department Dr. S.H. Lee, and President John M.K. Lei.

A seminar on health care followed the ceremony with Professor Shiu-kam Lam moderating. The speakers were practising cardiologist Rotarian Dr. Ping-ching Fong, and Deputy Director of Hong Kong Red Cross Blood Transfusion Centre Dr. Chi-kit Lin. About 400 elderly persons were in attendance.

With the assistance and co-operation of SAGE, blood samples were taken from 1912 elderly persons over a period of eight days in seven centres strategically located in different areas. This exercise was huge not only in terms of the number of elderly persons participating, but also the number of support persons involved. There were technicians from the laboratory and Red Cross, nurses and volunteers, distributors of refreshment, and members and spouses of both the Club and Rotary Club of Midlevels who worked to a roster in attending at the centres to help the elderly persons feel at ease. Every centre was attended by one or more volunteer doctors. One centre was attended by Rotary Past District Governors Peter Hall and Dr. Raymond Wong.

The first stage of the project was completed and reports were distributed in March and April to the elderly persons at seven centres, when talks on health care were also conducted.

To obtain the necessary data for the study, the University of Hong Kong suggested that the elderly persons should complete a questionnaire regarding their diet, life style, illnesses, living condition, etc. A trip to the University of Hong Kong unit at Queen Mary Hospital for the almost 2000 elderly persons over eight weekends was organized. Medical students from the University were on hand to discuss with each person the contents of his or her questionnaire during the months of April and May 1994, and volunteer nurses from Queen Mary Hospital performed ECG examination on them.

A selected group of 200 elderly persons with deranged thyroid function then underwent further tests.

The ultimate objective of the project was the publication of a book to document the findings and research materials with a view to

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betterment of health care of the aged. Work towards achieving the objective continued under the Rotary presidency of Peter Wing-leung Lai in 1994/1995, and Ng Wing Hong in 1995/1996.

We would like to congratulate and thank everyone involved in the project, starting with the 2000 elderly persons whose co-operation was vital, the staff and students of the University of Hong Kong, the staff of SAGE, the Geriatric Society, the Red Cross, the nurses from Queen Mary Hospital, all volunteers, Rotarians and their spouses of the Club as well as the Rotary Club of Midlevels led by Past Presidents Leon Lai and current President Raymond Ng. They have all made this project possible.

In addition to the Club's sponsorship to undertake this project, the University of Hong Kong also made substantial financial sacrifice by levying a nominal charge for the many services it provided.

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Forward by the Governor of Hong Kong

Much has been written about Hong Kong's remarkable success as a community, but less about the extent to which that success has been due to the courage, determination and hard work of those who are now enjoying the benefits — and facing the challenge — of old age. We owe them a great debt of gratitude.

We can go some way to discharging that debt by ensuring that the elderly in our community can live in dignity, with help and encouragement to maintain their health and to continue to participate fully in the life of the community. I am delighted, therefore, to see the publication of a book dedicated to pursuing that aim.

It should perhaps come as little surprise, given what they have achieved and the qualities they have demonstrated, that people in Hong Kong live longer than their counterparts almost anywhere else in the world. Life expectancy at birth was 75.4 years for men in 1994, up from 67.7 years in 1972, whilst that for women increased from 75.4 years to 81 years over the same period.

Increasing life expectancy, together with a dramatic decline in the birth rate, has brought great changes to the population distribution in Hong Kong. The proportion of persons aged 65 and above in the total population increased from 3.2% in 1961 to 8.8% in 1991. It is expected to reach 12.3% by the year 2001.

This book comes at an opportune time to help us to address the emerging needs of an ageing population. It will be a valuable source of reference for specialists, researchers, health care providers and for all those involved in the planning and provision of services for the elderly. It combines principles and practical experience and sets out new models to deal with the many challenges lying ahead.

I congratulate the editors, contributors and all involved for their success in putting together this valuable publication.

[Christopher Patten](#)
[Governor of Hong Kong](#)
[1996](#)