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Time for a change

T P Lam 林大邦

Editor, The Hong Kong Practitioner

When you are reading this editorial, you will already have noticed the new layout and other changes in *The Hong Kong Practitioner*. This revised format is a response to the feedback received from our readers as well as from a publishing consultant and our international colleagues. The political changes that have happened in Hong Kong over the last few years also influence our stance.

You, as our readers, are our most valued critics. *HK Pract* exists because we are also providing you a service. Our sponsors seem to agree by providing us with all the support we need. To allow us to keep improving, we must however continue to get your feedback. We therefore invite you to give us comments on this revised format.

You may also have noticed that we are increasingly becoming more bilingual. We now have Chinese articles for our *Murmur* column. We are also including the Chinese names of local authors because their Chinese names are probably used as often as their English names in their daily professional work. The increased use of Chinese does not imply English has become less important in *HK Pract*. English is the language used in most international medical exchanges and will remain the main language in *HK Pract*. However, the change of sovereignty in 1997 means that Hong Kong is now part of China and we have therefore increased our use of Chinese in *HK Pract* to match this change.

A separate new column on clinical audit will be added in *HK Pract* in the coming months to reflect the importance of this clinical activity. Audits, to assess, evaluate and improve the quality of our clinical services to our patients, are particularly important in primary care because family physicians often work in fairly isolated situations yet we need to always assess and evaluate our own work. Audits will likely bring about change and thus lead to improved standards of patient care. In the past we had published several audit reports but now we would like to encourage more family physicians to engage in this very useful clinical activity under a more regular column.

Our change also coincides with the increase in importance of family medicine within and outside the medical circle in Hong Kong. The much-debated Harvard Report pointed out some of the deficiencies of our health

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care delivery system. A major issue was the imbalanced developments for hospital care and for primary care, which has made the existing system financially unsustainable. Hong Kong needs better primary care and the Government must begin to look at its health care policy again and respond to the community needs. It is therefore also time for a significant change to our health care system.

The Hospital Authority, albeit a non-government but public-funded statutory body, has already responded to the changing needs and demands of the community by making family medicine training their largest vocational training scheme for junior doctors. They see the need for many more well-trained primary care doctors in Hong Kong, who will provide quality primary care after

finishing their training. Patients' need for expensive hospital care will then lessen. The Government must also publicly endorse this because there will need to be a change of patient's value system. Many members of the public have already well understood the importance of their family doctors. Many others will benefit from this patient education. An urgent matter for their attention will be the use of their family doctors instead of the hospitals' Accident and Emergency Departments when medical treatment is needed.

I can assure you that *HK Pract* will continue to serve your needs. I am also hoping that in the coming months and years our Government and policy makers will respond to the community needs by placing more emphasis on primary care. ■



The Hong Kong Practitioner invites doctors interested in editorial work to join its editorial team. Interested please contact: Dr T P Lam, Editor, *The Hong Kong Practitioner*, 7th Floor, HKAM Jockey Club Building, 99 Wong Chuk Hang Road, Hong Kong or fax to: 2866 0616.