Health Care for Aging - An Inevitable Problem
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Instead of finding the possibility of overcoming aging, a more down-to-earth solution is to well-develop health care services system to the elderly - a sustainable development in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, there are flaws in the current health care system, causing loss in both money and the quality of life.

Definitely solutions are needed. Direct funding from government is a way to release the pressure on the elderly health care, but it is unwise as it does not solve the problem underneath. And what we need is a sustainable solution which balances social responsibilities and rights.

The elderly
Most of the senior citizens are relatively immobile and active only in the districts they live in. Providing professional and concentrated health care services in every district will encourage the elderly to seek for proper medical care service whenever they fall ill.

Supporting the existing policy targeted at the elderly
the Hong Kong Housing Society has already launched the Senior Citizen Residences Scheme (SEN) (Figure 1) which is to develop residential courts targeted to the middle-income senior group. It should be a solution to medical, health and housing problems of old people as every court provides individual units and good facilities designated to the elderly, like health care centres with stand-by qualified nurses and clinics. These multi-purpose buildings reduce the difficulties and cost for the elderly to access medical facilities.

However, as it is in a “long lease” basis, applicants need a lump sum rent which may not be affordable to some people. The scheme could be modified by providing smaller flats with lower rents or more differentiated units to favour a wider class of the elderly.

In addition, there are only two courts located in Kowloon Bay and Tseung Kwan O. To maximize the benefits to all, there should be at least one court in each district. Although the costs will be high, it is unquestionably worth it to our society as the building not only serves the residents, but also provides services to the elderly in the located districts. Ultimately, SEN could also provide medical specialists services in each building.
With the reduction of heavy demands on hospital beds and medical services, the government could direct the funding of building new hospitals to other issues while providing more supports to health problems of the elderly.

**Soon-to-be-old persons**

According to the Hong Kong Population Projection of 2010-2039 by the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, the proportion of the elderly population will rise significantly from 13% in 2009 to 28% in 2039. Meanwhile, there is an estimated lift of population to an absolute amount of 2 millions. A considerable number of Hong Kong citizens (Figure 2) will enter the elderly group in the following 20 years.

![Elderly population projection in 2009-2039](image)

The awareness of health care should be raised and the ultimate result is to release the pressure on current medical facilities. With improvement of living standard and lifestyle, people will be less dependent on clinics or hospitals. Usage of medical facilities will only reserve for those who have severe diseases. There are several ways to meet this objective.

**Supporting the existing policy targeted to the elderly**

1. **Promotion of health care**

Intensive promotion through media and campaigns are necessary to convey the message of living healthily to the society. The contents of these activities should emphasize introducing basic health knowledge and efficient ways to remain diseases-resistant. For instance, encourage the habit of regular body checks and medical consultation. Also, providing advice on having balanced and healthy diets can help reduce the public’s reliance on hospital or medical facilities. These practices not only solve the problems of insufficient funding, inadequate physicians and hospital beds when the target group gets old, but also improve the quality of life of elderly in the long term.
2. Extending the coverage of health insurance to the poor

Although the government will implement the healthcare reform soon, it implicitly targets the middle-high-income population. To ensure all citizens could be benefited from the health insurance, subsidies to the poor are necessary. When people get old and seek for medical services, the insurance claims will be paid. This kind of protection is one of the essential components of a successful health care system that benefits the soon-to-be-old group by supporting their payments of expensive medical fees.

Conclusion

The elderly population will grow both in proportion and absolute amount. Our society requires sustainable ways to provide sufficient assistance to the senior citizens and improve citizens’ health and lifestyles to prevent the bloom of usage in public or private medical facilities in the future. Extension and improvement of current policies are necessary to be implemented by both public authorities and the government, as these will eventually bring Hong Kong to the one of the cities with the best means duelling with health care problem for aging population.

References: