

Medical and Health Research Network

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The University of Hong Kong

For policy-makers and those undertaking research linked to policy

Issue 1 March 2001

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Introduction

Welcome to the inaugural edition of the Medical and Health Research Network newsletter. This newsletter is intended for all those working in the field of health care policy, whether as policy-makers or as researchers. It aims to keep you informed about the activities of the Network and to present some of the information that the Network is generating, in a form that should be readily accessible to the decision-makers who can use it. This newsletter is only one of the Network's activities – watch out for more. We also invite any interested members of the University to join us as Network members, to contribute to our activities. See the next page for joining details.



The Medical and Health Research Network

The Medical and Health Research Network was formed to support, conduct and disseminate health care policy research, advocacy, analysis and planning in order to improve access to high quality health care in Hong Kong. Its mission is to stimulate cross-disciplinary scientific enquiries into ways in which the Hong Kong health care services can best be organised, funded and delivered. The Network is developed on the premise that the University should be a key partner and champion in the processes of health care policy research, advocacy, analysis and planning by bringing evidence-based information to those activities. The Network functions at three levels: the Advisory Panel composed of major policy-makers, the Executive Board and the various Study Groups.

Executive Board of the Medical and Health Research Network

Professor SP Chow, Network Convenor Chair Professor, Department of Orthopaedic Surgery; Pro- Vice-Chancellor	
Professor CLW Chan Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences	Dr SSC Chan Acting Head, Department of Nursing Studies
Dr WS Chan Associate Professor, Department of Statistics & Actuarial Science	Professor I Chi Head, Department of Social Work & Social Administration Convener: Study Group on Ageing
Dr LW Chu Consultant, Department of Medicine, Queen Mary Hospital; Honorary Associate Professor, Faculty of Medicine	Dr GM Leung Clinical Assistant Professor, Department of Community Medicine Convener: Study Group on Primary Care
Dr SM McGhee Associate Professor, Department of Community Medicine Convener: Study Group on Health Economics	Dr KW Ng Head, Department of Statistics & Actuarial Science
Mr HK Yip Director, Policy 21 Ltd.	Dr PSF Yip Senior Lecturer, Department of Statistics & Actuarial Science Convener: Study Group on Health Information

All those interested are invited to join any Study Group which matches their expertise or interest. In the first instance, please contact the Study Group convener.

Report from the Study Group on Ageing

Activities of the Centre on Ageing in March, 2001

In March, 2001, the Centre on Ageing is organizing a series of training activities. There will be two 36-hour intensive courses for human service professionals. The first one is the course on “Understanding the Psychological Aspects of Ageing and Clinical Implications” conducted by Professor Ada Mui, Columbia University. The other is “Effective Human Service Management : Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating” by Ms Grace Ng from New Zealand.

Apart from these two courses, there will also be a series of seminars and workshops. On March 7, we have the “Forum on the Impacts of Population Changes on the Older Adults” jointly presented by Dr Zachary Zimmer, Research Associate for the New York City Population Council and Dr Paul Yip, our Centre Associate. We also have Dr Lee Ann Mjelde-Mossey from the University of Colorado to give a seminar on “Productive and Healthy Ageing : Key to success” on March 19, 2001. At the end of the month on March 30, we will be having another seminar for invited groups, presented by Professor Yeates Conwell, University of Rochester. The presentation topic is “Suicide in the second half of life : Preliminary findings of a case-control psychological autopsy study”.

For more details about the above activities, please visit our website at www.hku.hk/coage

Report from the Study Group on Health Economics

Passive smoking at work: the short-term cost

Published in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health 2000, 54: 673-6.

SM McGhee, P Adab, AJ Hedley, TH Lam, LM Ho, R Fielding, CM Wong.
Department of Community Medicine, University of Hong Kong

Abstract: The objective of this study was to estimate the impact of passive smoking at work on use of health care services and absenteeism. A cross-sectional survey was used with a self-completed questionnaire. The sample was a workforce in Hong Kong. There were 5142 never-smokers out of 9926 respondents. The main result was that there was a consistently strong association among never-smoking males between the length of time they were exposed to passive smoking at work and self-reported consultations with a doctor, use of medicines and time off work. Results for females were similar but most were not statistically significant. The conclusion of this study was that the exposure of healthy adults to passive smoking at work is related to utilisation of health care services and extra time off work. This results in costs to the health services, to employers and to those exposed.

Implications for policy-makers: This study demonstrates and, to some extent, quantifies the health detriment due to passive smoking. Those decision-makers with responsibility for safety of buildings or with a public health role need to have this information in order to

- 1) determine what might be done to safeguard members of the public and employees' health
- 2) support their decisions in the face of opposing interests.

Report from the Study Group on Health Information

The effects of the year of the Dragon on reproductive behaviour among Chinese: an experience of Hong Kong SAR

Research report 291, Department of Statistics and Actuarial Science, University of Hong Kong

PSF Yip and J Lee
Department of Statistics and Actuarial Science, Centre of Asian Studies, The University of Hong Kong.

Abstract: The annual totals of births in Hong Kong SAR fell substantially in the past two decades; hence the total fertility rate (TFR) followed a consistent decline to a low of 0.97 in 1999. Despite a long-term declining trend, there have been short-term increases in the annual totals of births. The more conspicuous increases are identified in 1988 and 2000, which were the year of the Dragon in Chinese astrology. The fertility rates are being examined with a view to gaining some insight into whether Chinese customs and traditional beliefs might have influence over couples on reproductive behaviour. The study highlights that influence of traditional beliefs could possibly change a couple's decision as to when to have children. There is no evidence whatsoever from the study to suggest that influence of traditional beliefs might change the number of children a couple wants. The proportion of high order births occurring in the year of the Dragon remained unaffected despite a marked increase in the annual total of births. The study also observes that younger generations are no less prone to changes induced by traditional beliefs than older generations.

Joint HKU-Harvard Executive Certificate Programme on Health Sector Reform and Sustainable Financing

Introduction

Hong Kong is now at the cross-road of health care reform. “How to analyze the problems in our health care system ?” and “Where does the money comes from ?” are two important questions that need to be answered. The University of Hong Kong’s Medical and Health Research Network will organize a HKU-Harvard Executive Certificate Programme to analyze and solve these issues.

Dates

(To be confirmed)

Speakers

Harvard University

Professor William Hsiao

Professor Marc Roberts

Dr Winnie Yip

University of Hong Kong

Professor SP Chow

Dr. GM Leung

Dr Sarah McGhee

Dr Paul Yip

Course fee

HK\$ 16,000 for 1 Module

HK\$ 28,000 for 2 Modules

Maximum number of participants: 40

Module 1: Analyzing Health Sector Performance

- Policy cycle
- Driving forces for HK’s health sector reform
- Economics: market competition; market failures and ethics and economics
- Paradigm for diagnosis of health systems: ends and means
- Diagnosis of Health Systems

Module 2: Health Care Financing

- Goals for health care financing
- Methods of health care financing
- National Health Account – data and methods of compilation
- General revenue financing, earmarked taxes and their economic effect
- Introduction to social insurance
- Introduction to private insurance and health insurance markets
- Medical savings accounts
- User fees
- A framework for developing a national financing strategy

Certificates of attendance will be given out jointly by the University of Hong Kong and Harvard University

Course outline

The newsletter of the Medical and Health Research Network. **Aims:** to inform policy-makers and researchers of the activities of the Network and to encourage feedback to improve the utility of the Network in shaping health-related policies in Hong Kong. **Funded:** by the Medical and Health Research Network, Faculty of Medicine, University of Hong Kong. **Mailing address:** Faculty of Medicine, University of Hong Kong, Sassoon Road, Hong Kong. **Editor:** Dr SM McGhee **Tel:** 2819 9193 **Fax :** 2855 9528 **Email:** smmcghee@hkucc.hku.hk