

## Editorial

### Hong Kong Journal of Paediatrics

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## Time to Move Forward and Put Politics Behind

The Year 2004 was studded with a lot of medical political issues that have upset many people, both the lay and the professionals. The aftermath of SARS of 2003 had initially brought Hong Kong people together not only in enhancing various procedures to improve environmental hygiene but also in recognising the noble gestures of selfless dedication of the medical and allied professionals in fighting a horrific and hitherto unknown disease.

Alas, while the overwhelming applause and congratulatory messages were still pouring in, politicians had seized an opportunity to question the validity of a review by a panel of world experts assessing the "handling of this SARS epidemic". Many vocal people had jumped onto the popular band-wagon of Hong Kong in these days that is "to protest and to reject whatever coming from the weak Government". Despite the fact that experts and professionals from many other parts of the world had openly acknowledged the high standard of care and a reasonably appropriate managerial arrangement for this epidemic, a number of politically motivated medical professionals had joined in a call for a major "political blood shed".

The results were the retirement of the Director of Health and a number of resignations including the Secretary for Health and Welfare, the Chairman of the Hospital Authority and the Director of Operation of the Hospital Authority. Even several highly acclaimed front-line professionals had become so disheartened by unkind criticisms that the Dean of the Chinese University who had led the major fight against SARS resigned from his position leaving Hong Kong to work in another part of Asia "to pursue his own interest". A selfless and sacrificial clinician-expert who had spent the whole time in the hospital to lead the day-in day-out care of these critically ill SARS patients resigned from being the chief of the medical service of his hospital.

Never before in my long professional life have I witnessed more intriguing, if not dirty, politics and self-mutilation within the medical profession than this time! Political gain was apparently placed way above rational acknowledgement of expert medical opinion, even if this was obtained from none other than several renowned world authorities. It was saddening to note the distrust that many politicians have put in our profession. It was disgusting to hear some of the remarks made by certain medical and allied professionals, who had "put more oil on fire" by raising misleading "challenges".

The habit of making public battering remarks on medical problems has continued after the SARS outbreak. Provocative comments were made on a recent small outbreak of necrotising entero-colitis in a public hospital. Piercing criticisms were received by another hospital where an outbreak of a viral respiratory disease

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occurred in a children's ward for the disabled. Inquiries were also demanded for a small outbreak of Rota virus enteritis in yet another hospital. The public has been led into a state of panic, for fear of any outbreak of infectious diseases which would be handled by a group of incapable professionals. Those remarks have undoubtedly helped to promote greater distrust in the medical profession. People seem to be ignorant of the fact that even in the best of hands patients may succumb; even in the most ideal hospital setting, cross-infections have occurred.

People probably do not realise that many common childhood infections do not only spread like fire, they often kill as well. For example, Respiratory Syncytial Virus claims over 3000 lives in small children each year in U.S.A. Staphylococcal sepsis has also resulted in many demises in young infants. These conditions have occurred among the most modern institutions staffed by the most professionally trained personnel. If political and economic efforts were to be spent on investigating these phenomena at a similar scale as demanded by some of the Hong Kong politicians, one wonders how much resources would be left for other non-medical businesses even for a big country like U.S.A.

Although these "unusual infections" seem over, the damage done to the medical profession in Hong Kong has been enormous. The image of the profession has become greatly eroded and the status of the public hospitals further down-graded. It is time to move forward in this New Year 2005. The medical profession of Hong Kong should unite together to rescue the sagging reputation and to regain the trust and respect that the public used to place on us.

Paediatricians should actively contribute to all aspects of the well-being of the children population in Hong Kong. They should not be worried by the shrinking professional activities resulted from the reducing children population. The dramatic decline in birth rate in the past decade should have given them an opportunity to improve the quality-care

for children both in health and in disease. They should not be bothered by the influx of visitors coming to give birth to babies to become citizens of Hong Kong. After all, these children may eventually turn out to be the much needed "young bloods" to succeed the aging population and to keep Hong Kong intellectually and economically vibrant in the future. Paediatricians should also contribute to the much needed debate on "educational reform" to ensure that Hong Kong children would receive the best and most holistic education, preparing them to become not only intellectually and physically fit but also morally and ethically robust.

The Journal has also decided to turn a new page this year. The two mother organisations of the Journal, viz. the Hong Kong College of Paediatricians and the Hong Kong Paediatric Society, have re-constituted the editorial board. New members have been appointed for two years with the view to injecting newer ideas to improve the production. A small panel of International Advisors will also be invited to provide guidance and to enhance the status of the Journal. Of course we welcome inputs from members of the two mother-organisations and our readership as well.

We look forward to a new beginning in 2005, not only for the Journal but also for the medical community of Hong Kong in particular. We do not want to see any more unnecessary political in-fighting among the profession. We do not cherish on any more individual stardoms to appear at the expense of sacrificing the reputation of the medical profession. We hope to see restitution of the confidence and respect that the public used to put on the profession without having further erosion by elements among our own ranks.

**CY YEUNG**  
**Chief Editor**