



Chief Executive's Speech
Hospital Authority Convention 2014 – 7-8 May 2014
Creating a Systemic Vision for Future Healthcare

Vice-minister Sun, Chief Secretary, Dr Ko, Professor Leong, distinguished guests, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen – good morning.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the 2014 Hospital Authority Convention. This flagship event for the healthcare community in Hong Kong plays an important role in HA's efforts to help people stay healthy by providing quality patient-centred care. As in previous years, this opportunity for colleagues to meet with leading healthcare experts and gain exposure to a diverse array of new information and ideas will greatly benefit us in our endeavours.

Since its establishment in early 1990, HA has grown to become one of the most respected and efficient public healthcare systems in the world.

The statistics speak for themselves. Using the equivalent of just 2.5% of Hong Kong's GDP, we meet close to 90% of our city's inpatient healthcare needs. In 2012/13, our services included over 1.5 million patient discharge episodes, 2.3 million A&E attendances, 9.2 million specialist outpatient attendances, 5.9 million primary care attendances and more than 1.9 million community outreach visits.

At this point, I have to offer my heartfelt thanks to the Hong Kong Government for continuing its strong support of HA. Our financial provision from the Government for 2014/15 will reach HK\$47.97 billion – a 3.9% increase over that of the previous year. Last December, the Government also approved a one-off grant of HK\$13 billion to help fund intensive improvement programmes at HA facilities over the next 10 years or so – an unprecedented allocation that will enable the renovation of more than 500 wards, the provision of 800 new beds and the expansion of clinical facilities such as operating theatres and day procedure centres, as well as various electrical, mechanical and universal accessibility upgrades and enhancements.

We are also delighted to have received official consent to commence planning for a new acute hospital in the Kai Tak Development Area on top of our various other expansion and redevelopment projects. We sincerely hope the allocation of public resources to healthcare will remain a priority for the Government in the years to come.

However, we are also fully conscious that resources are not unlimited, particularly in consideration of the daunting healthcare challenges that we will face in the future. While we can take pride in what we have achieved, we must remain firmly forward looking. The need to take action today to meet healthcare needs that are years, even decades, ahead of us is the key message I wish to convey to you this morning.

Like many places in the world, the demographic profile of Hong Kong's population is undergoing a significant change. By 2031, the large number of people born between the mid-1950s and mid-1960s – the so-called 'baby boomer generation' – will all be in their 60s and 70s. By 2041, Hong Kong's population is expected to have grown by 1.3 million compared with that of today to 8.5 million, with the percentage of over-65s rising from 13% to 30% during the same period. Our average life expectancy is also forecast to rise from 80 to 84 years for men and from 86 to 90 years for women.

The consequences of these dramatic shifts will be felt in many areas of society, but particularly so in the demand for healthcare services. In terms of general bed utilization rate in Hong Kong, the requirement for those aged 65 and above is about nine times that of below 65. For those aged 85 and above, it is almost 20 times that of under-65s.

Our ageing population, extended longevity and the rising incidence of complex and lifestyle-based chronic diseases are just some of the many influences driving long-term changes in Hong Kong's social and demographic landscape that will have a profound impact on the demand for effective delivery of HA's services in the future.

Our current model of care is clearly not sustainable if we are to successfully handle the long-term shifts in healthcare demand. We must introduce new thinking now as to how we can continue to provide high-quality care in the future. We require fresh perspectives and ideas for service delivery and promoting good health.

Rapid advances in technology are creating exciting new possibilities to help us adapt. However, with finite resources, we cannot keep pace with every innovation. We must strategically integrate technology into systems that

support – and not drive – patient care. Public expectations about our services and the role of patients in the treatment process are also continuing to evolve. Depending on our response, such changes can either assist or assail us in our endeavours.

Based on current projections, our 2041/42 recurrent financial resource requirement will be an estimated HK\$169 billion – 3.8 times more than in 2013/14. Some 18,000 new beds, 6,200 extra doctors, 24,000 more nurses and 7,700 new allied health professionals are among the more important of the many additional resources that will be necessary to maintain a level of service that is comparable with that of today.

And we cannot just consider quantitative factors such as the level of resources we can receive, the number of patients we can treat, and the length of people's lives. We must also assess qualitative aspects – how we will develop the capabilities of staff and optimise quality and efficiency in deploying their time, how we should define our services and best ensure public satisfaction as to how they are delivered, and how we will manage the physical and psychological standards of living of our patients.

The search for sustainable solutions

Designing a long-term strategy involves many difficult questions and few easy answers.

- How can we address the implications of changes in the demographic landscape in a way that ensures equitable access to quality care?
- How do we facilitate a collaborative approach to healthcare that draws on the strengths of inter-specialty treatment and gives patients a more participatory role in managing their health?
- How can we achieve the systemic shifts necessary to better handle the rising number of patients requiring multi-disciplinary and inter-specialty care?
- How do we strategically integrate technology into our services to support, not dictate, patient care?
- How can we strike an appropriate balance between promoting longevity and ensuring quality and dignity of life?

These are just some of the complex issues that require careful consideration in the search for effective sustainable solutions.

Keeping pace with technology and changing healthcare needs

Technological advances continue to change our lives in dramatic ways.

For example, with the advent of telephone in the mid-19th century, communication that once took days or even weeks by post became a real-time process. From the rotary phones of my youth through cordless and brick-sized mobile devices to the smartphone ‘mini-command centres’ of today – we can now carry more technological power in our pockets and purses than was used on the early space missions!

Even in HA’s relatively short history, a similar pace of technological development in the medical field has led to remarkable changes in diagnostic and treatment techniques that have had a positive impact on community health and well-being.

A little more than two decades ago, colorectal cancer was widely considered a surgical disease that would be diagnosed with a barium x-ray as the primary pre-op investigation and surgical removal of the tumour as the only potential remedy or ‘cure’. There were no effective drugs available to prevent or treat recurrences and the involvement of oncologists was largely limited to the provision of palliative care.

Since that time, however, the development of diagnostic tools such as capsule endoscopy, colonoscopies, MRI and CT scans have significantly increased the accuracy of pre-operative assessment and enhanced treatment management for chemotherapy and radiotherapy. The development of adjuvant chemotherapy drugs and, subsequently, molecular targeted agents, have led to more personalised treatment regimes and improved post-operative response and survival rates. And the refinement of surgical techniques, including robotic surgery, laparoscopic surgery and better anastomosis tools, has reduced operation related morbidity.

Technology has enhanced clinical workflow and efficiency, treatment effectiveness and patient comfort. It is also creating new possibilities for greater patient participation and empowerment in managing their own healthcare, with people more easily able to access their own personal health information as well as health-related advice.

Broader access to information, remote diagnostic services to obtain immediate medical assistance, and home-based, self-administered treatment of chronic conditions through technological means are just some of the ways in which

technology might play a role in future service models as we strive to make efficient use of finite resources while ensuring high standards of patient care.

In a related vein, just as individuals now use the Internet for everything from assessing options and peer group opinions on restaurants to e-shopping, technology is creating increasingly discerning ‘medical consumers’ with more sophisticated and demanding expectations.

Future healthcare models must work to meet increasingly individualised needs by providing patients with the knowledge and tools to make informed, realistic decisions and become collaborative partners in the healthcare process.

But while the many benefits of technology are undeniable, we should not and cannot allow its acquisition to become our primary goal. We must be smart and strategic in adopting new innovations to ensure that they serve our aims rather than drive them. Technology is merely a tool to help us achieve our overarching objective: patient-centred integrated care that leverages the strengths of a holistic approach.

Holistic care beyond treating diseases

A purely technological approach to improving health creates the risk of focusing solely on what is possible, at the expense of what is practical and what best promotes respect for dignity of life. It may also serve to reinforce rigid models and silo-based structures that emphasise specific treatment processes over functional outcomes, specific disease management over total patient health, and specific cures over patient comfort and functional needs. While each part of such fragmented systems may provide ‘treatment for patients’, true ‘patient-centred healthcare’ must be much more than the sum of these fragmented parts.

We must look beyond traditional models of ‘sick-care’ management. We should focus on treating individual patients and their unique healthcare needs and concerns rather than on treating individual diseases. We should not overemphasise curative and acute aspects of illness and disease at the expense of leveraging the strengths of rehabilitative and palliative care. We must also encourage individuals to become active participants in managing their health.

We must integrate technology in ways that encourage close collaboration among specialties and promote more organic, less mechanistic organisational structures to meet future ‘patient-centred healthcare’ needs.

An integrated approach – total patient care

Effective and efficient healthcare in the future will need to be as unique as the individuals it serves. True ‘total patient care’ must use a collaborative, multi-disciplinary approach to determine what is best for each individual patient and their particular circumstances rather than simply how best to treat any illness or disease.

This will require further discussion of how we develop and use rehabilitation, ambulatory, community and patient-administered healthcare models to reduce the strain and, at times, misplaced emphasis, on acute and in-patient services. Our healthcare professionals must learn to collaborate with colleagues from across the health services spectrum and to place value on good communication and other soft skills in addition to medical expertise.

Hong Kong’s changing demographics will demand greater consideration of not only how to help people to have longer, healthier lives, but also quality of life issues – how best to provide quality rehabilitative and palliative care, as well as how to help those nearing the end of their life to complete their journey with dignity and in peace. In the final stages of all our lives, it will be ‘care’ not ‘cure’ that is most important.

The way ahead – thoughts for new actions

The task ahead is daunting and the need to take action now to meet future healthcare needs is clear.

There will be trade-offs and tough decisions to make and we have to explore solutions for the challenges we already know about and for other potential changes that may lie unseen on the road ahead. We don’t yet have the answers as to exactly how to create a systemic vision for future healthcare. This morning I have simply presented some new thoughts for possible actions – it is now the task of us all to start looking for the most appropriate actions for the most effective change. Here are just some of the relevant questions again:

- How will our patients of tomorrow differ from our patients of today?
- How will future patient needs change the way we need to deliver care?
- How could changes in technology support different service delivery models and empower patients to engage in more effective self-care?
- What skills and knowledge will healthcare professionals need to remain effective caregivers in the future?
- What can we learn or change today that will help us meet the challenges and seize the opportunities of tomorrow?

The power and potential of any piece of equipment, management system or other asset are ultimately governed by the skills, priorities and ingenuity of the individuals who have these resources at their control. And despite many technological advances in medical diagnosis and treatment over recent years, there is still no known substitute for the curative powers of a warm smile, a caring word or a thoughtful gesture of human kindness. In this latter respect, we are highly optimistic about the ability of HA to move closer to its goals.

HA is deeply fortunate to have an outstanding team of dedicated and value driven professionals. We will step up efforts to improve working conditions and development opportunities for colleagues at all levels who remain the foundation of our success. I am grateful for your passion and commitment and I am honoured to work alongside each and every one of you.

With the hard work and skills of our staff, and the backing and belief of all our other stakeholders, as well as the insightfulness of Dr KO, the Secretary for Food and Health, and our Chairman Professor LEONG, HA can surely continue with its tireless efforts to enhance the lifelong health and well-being of the people of Hong Kong.

Thank you.