



Hong Kong College of Paediatricians  
香港兒科醫學院  
(Incorporated in Hong Kong with Limited Liability)



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Prof. Tai-fai FOK  
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**Hon. Legal Advisor**

Peter Mark & Co

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Walter Ma & Co

By Fax (2509 0580) and By Post

14 November 2007

The Honorable Mr Donald Yam-Kuen Tsang, GBS, JP  
Chief Executive  
The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region  
People's Republic of China  
Government House  
Hong Kong

Dear *Mr Tsang*

**Response to 2007-08 Policy Address**

Our College is very much saddened by the increasing number of tragedies of deaths and severe injuries to children resulting from abuse and neglect. Following the Tin Shui Wai incident in 2004, we had expressed our support to the government in setting up a multidisciplinary committee to review unnatural child deaths, and had also submitted an outline of such a system to the Social Welfare Department. We are disappointed that after three years of deliberation, the proposed pilot Child Fatality Review Mechanism to be launched will only be a documentary review based on submitted reports. The mechanism will both be limited in scope – only those with implication on social welfare services and delayed in timing – only after completion of judicial processes. Meanwhile many valuable opportunities to learn and prevent similar tragedies are lost. We urge that a more timely and thorough mechanism be started as a matter of urgency and to cover all unnatural child deaths.

Despite the reactive measures that usually follow each alarming case of child abuse, the number of cases of child abuse continues to increase. This indicates that these existing measures are ineffective or inadequate in preventing this overwhelming problem. In Hong Kong, the responsibility of management and prevention of child abuse is largely shouldered by the Social Welfare Department and the various social service agencies. To deal with increasing caseloads with complex family problems and often parental psychiatric illnesses, adequate resources, strong governmental support, multidisciplinary professional collaboration and effective coordination are essential.





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To prevent child abuse in the long run, a government with vision would invest into strengthening family relationships, enhancing parent / child bonding, effective parenting and cultivating resilience in children. Our College urges the government to develop a coherent child policy. The current claim that each government bureau or department has her own policy related to children can no longer be accepted. The United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child came into effect in Hong Kong in 1994. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has called upon the Hong Kong Government to set up an institute to monitor the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Such a call in the Legislative Council in June this year for a Children's Commission was passed unanimously. A Family Council to be set up according to the Policy Address may serve certain functions but the interests of a child goes far beyond that of the family and may not always be served if family integrity and 'harmony' are the prime concerns. Our College strongly advocates for the setting up of a Children's Commission as well.

In the Policy Address, we are pleased to find a number of measures concerning the welfare of young people, some of which are remedies for burning issues. Many existing problems such as unemployed youth, juvenile drug abuse and abusive parents take their roots in childhood. Policies favouring positive childhood development will eventually bear fruits in yielding healthy adults and a healthy society. While the government is planning to extend free education to 12 years, it is equally important, if not more so, to ensure disadvantaged children are supported in other educational expenses and opportunities for a holistic education. The Child Development Fund, if only to be released after 18 years old, would be a mismatch to the need in the formative early years. The Comprehensive Child Development Service which is to be expanded to all districts in 07/08, must be supported with the necessary resources.

Concerning health care reform, we are in support of enhancing primary health care, promotion of public-private-partnership and the establishment of centres of excellence. Medical problems of infants and children are very different from those encountered in adulthood. Paediatricians are trained to manage the diverse physical and psychological problems of children from birth to adolescence. Therefore they are the most appropriate doctors to provide primary care to patients of this age group. The establishment of centres of excellence especially in paediatrics will concentrate and therefore enhance the quality and cost-effectiveness of tertiary care for children. While the details of the proposal are still being worked out, we must caution that sufficient





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additional resources need to be injected into the project, otherwise, existing services to other children will be jeopardized as a result of the redistribution of resources.

In conclusion, we appreciate the government's direction of sustainable development. There is no better start than to begin with a comprehensive child policy and a child commission to ensure its implementation if Hong Kong is to build a population that can realise the government's vision of economic growth and development.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Louis CK Low  
President  
Hong Kong College of Paediatricians

c.c. Dr York Chow, Secretary for Food and Health  
(By Fax 2102 2568 and By Post) --