

LegCo Panel on Health Services

Men's Health Programme Conducted by the Department of Health

Background

This paper briefs Members on the Men's Health Programme conducted by the Department of Health (DH).

2. As undertaken in the 2001 Policy Objective Booklet for Health Services, DH will launch a Men's Health Programme (MHP) on 15 August 2002. The goal is to improve the physical, mental and social health and well being of adult men in Hong Kong. This serves to strengthen another component of lifelong holistic care.

Programme planning

3. Contrary to the common notion of men being the stronger sex, statistics show that men have consistently poorer health indicators compared to women. Men fare worse in life expectancy as well as morbidity and mortality due to almost all major disease conditions. Much of this gender gap is due to the fact that men lead more unhealthy lifestyles, risk-taking behaviours and do not seek medical help as readily or effectively as women.

4. In planning the MHP, we drew reference from literature review and overseas experience. To ensure the MHP suits the needs of Hong Kong men, we commissioned a market research firm to conduct a series of focus groups studies. Through these studies, we have obtained valuable information on how men look at their health and what they think can best help them.

5. There is a considerable number of health services providers for men's health in Hong Kong, both in the public and private sectors. Unfortunately, both health statistics and the focus group studies show that men are not inclined to use preventive health services despite their availability. Furthermore, the focus group studies reveal that men are not aware of the availability of comprehensive health information for them.

6. The MHP will thus position itself as a health promotive programme that

addresses men's health issues comprehensively at multiple levels, including lifestyle, social factors, health seeking behaviour, and common disease conditions. This is also consistent with DH's core function and strength in health promotion.

Programme activities

7. The MHP will be launched on August 15, 2002 via a press conference. Our focus group studies have shown clearly that men's awareness of their own health is inadequate. The first step for any successful programme is to enhance public awareness of men's health issues.

8. We have compiled a Men's Health Report which will be published at the launch of the MHP. The Report contains the most up-date and comprehensive description about men's health status in Hong Kong, bringing the gender health discrepancy and the factors behind it into light.

9. The MHP features an attractive Men's Health Website (<http://hkmenshealth.com>) that provides a one-stop station to a full range of men's health information, as well as a compendium of men's health resources available in Hong Kong. This will facilitate men accessing the services they need. Through the website, counselling service is provided for men's health concerns and problems.

10. The focus group studies also found that some form of outreach service is desirable as men are a difficult-to-reach target group. The MHP will organize a series of roving exhibitions in popular places where men work or frequent. We will collaborate with other partners to conduct health promotion activities at the workplace, particularly for those occupations where men predominate.

11. Following the press conference in August 2002, there will be a publicity campaign during August through September 2002. The publicity campaign aims at arousing awareness of the MHP and it contains professionally designed messages targeted at men about lifestyle issues.

12. The MHP has produced some posters, leaflets, brochures, and premiums on men's health. It will share these resources with various DH services, as well as external stakeholders including medical professional groups and social service organizations. It will also compile and disseminate a list of local men's health resources to medical professionals to facilitate referral of male clients with specific needs.

Programme sustainability and effectiveness

13. After programme launch this year which aims at awareness building, the MHP will harp on specific themes identified in the focus group studies. It will tie in with other health promotion activities under DH and work with both internal and external collaborators to explore intersectoral joint projects. It will produce more research reports on men's health in specific areas of interest.

14. Members are asked to note the contents of this paper.

Department of Health
August 2002