

Views of the Hong Kong Association of the Pharmaceutical Industry on the UMAO Bill (3)

The Hong Kong Association of the Pharmaceutical Industry (HKAPI) is pleased to participate in discussions regarding the UMAO bill. We have already distributed HKAPI's views on the proposed amendment in mid-November and submitted another position paper in December 2004. Helping all individuals in Hong Kong make better informed health decisions should be a top priority. HKAPI thinks the following two criteria are very important when reviewing the UMAO Bill.

1. Respect Patients' Right To Know

Patients have a right to access accurate, up-to-date evidence-based information regarding their medication choices. Whereas HKAPI recognizes that physicians and pharmacists should be the primary sources of information to patients, we also acknowledge the time and resource constraints in providing such information. In the survey "Consumer Knows Best" conducted by the Lion Rock Institute in February 2005, over 80% of respondents reported they were unable to get adequate information on health and medical issues from registered doctors. Currently, patients actively use the tools at hand to search for such information including information technology. Unfortunately, most patients have little or no way of judging whether information in the public domain is accurate and evidence based. The quality of information that is available is highly heterogeneous in quality. Consumer groups rightfully demand that the public is protected against being misled by potentially false, exaggerated or non-evidence based claims by western medicines, health supplements, or traditional Chinese medicine. At the same time, UMAO prohibits patients from receiving evidence-based information on pharmaceutical products which is essential in managing their own health.

2. Evidence based as criteria in advertising

The government must balance the patient's right to know about potentially life saving medicines while at the same time guarding against consumer manipulation. Hong Kong has an excellent system for the registration of pharmaceutical products based upon evidence-based medicine that demonstrates efficacy, safety, and quality. HKAPI supports the broader dissemination of up-to-date, scientific and evidence-based information regarding modern medicine through high quality patient education of registered pharmaceutical products. It is imperative that patients understand the need to consult healthcare providers for diagnosis and treatment direction. At the same time, the provision of appropriate up-to-date scientific, evidence-based information safeguards that the right patients get placed on the right medicines for the right conditions.

In short, Hong Kong is a knowledge-based community, but people lack adequate information about their health. HKAPI suggests evidence-based scientific information on registered pharmaceutical products should be provided to the public.