

The Hong Kong Medical Association shares the concern of many citizens that misleading or exaggerated claims of the so-called 'health food' products may cause harm, as a result of either improper self-medications or delay in receiving proper treatments.

We also support the stand of the Expert Committee that health claims in orally consumed products which might affect the health of the public should be prohibited.

Based on the above, we feel that the 3 groups of health claims which are subjected to third level of restriction should be placed on first or second level instead.

- (i) Health claims relating to regulation of body immune system against disease including cancers, chronic diseases and infection:
Cancer is the top killer in Hong Kong. Aids is a deadly disease of the immune system. Diseases such as these should not be taken lightly.
- (ii) Health claims relating to promotion of detoxication:
As has been pointed out by a member of the Expert Committee, people may be misled to believe that it could treat heavy metal poisoning and kidney failure. Since many citizens believe that cancers may be the result of accumulation of poisons in the body, claims relating to promotion of detoxication may result in improper self medications and delay in seeking proper treatments.
- (iii) Health claims relating to slimming or fat reduction of the body including fat burning, eliminating fat, controlling appetite, absorbing fat and eliminating fluid retention:
People who are worried that they are overweight should first seek medical advice. In a recent survey by the Department of Health, it was found that people often have wrong perception of their body weight. In the study, among those with normal weights, 39% perceived themselves as overweight, and 12 % of the underweight people regarded themselves as overweight! Of concern, among those taking medicine/health products to control weight, the majority was neither overweight nor obese. Similarly, among those visiting weight loss centres for weight control, the majority was also neither overweight nor obese. Weight reduction in these people will certainly be hazardous to their health. Fluid retention may be the result of serious illness such as heart disease and renal failure. Delay in treatment in such cases can be fatal.

Finally, products which claim regulation of body sugar or glucose including alteration of function of the pancreas should receive 1st level restriction, the same as products claiming "regulation of the endocrine system including maintenance or alteration of

hormonal secretions." Diabetes mellitus is a disease of the endocrine function of the pancreas resulting in elevated blood sugar level. Poor-control of diabetes can result in either hyperglycaemia or hypoglycemia -- both are equally fatal.

In conclusion, one cannot say that the products of the above 4 groups of health claims pose relatively lesser risk to the public health comparing with the other 5 groups. Therefore, their categories of restriction should be revised.

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