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The Hong Kong Medical Association

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Call for Universal Ban of Smoking in Indoor Workplaces and Public Places

The Hong Kong Medical Association strongly call for a universal and simultaneous ban of smoking in indoor workplaces and public places. There should not be any exemptions for any type of establishments, regardless of their size and nature of business.

Smoking is a major cause of fatal diseases. Over 5,500 persons died of diseases induced by smoking every year in Hong Kong; that means 15 persons were killed by tobacco everyday. Secondhand smoke also kills 1,324 every year in Hong Kong. Many potentially toxic gases and carcinogenic substances are present in higher concentrations in side-stream smoke than in mainstream smoke. Just 30 minutes exposure is enough to reduce coronary blood flow. Yet many employees are subjected to heavy secondhand smoke in workplaces, like restaurants, bars and karaokes, without a choice.

It is heartbreaking to see the endless agony suffered by patients of lung cancer, chronic obstructive airway disease, heart disease and other illnesses related to inhalation of cigarette smoke as well as the mental torture endured by their relatives. Being the representative body of all registered medical practitioners in Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Medical Association fully supports:

- A comprehensive ban of smoking in all restaurants, bars, karaokes, schools, indoor workplaces, and other indoor public premises such as private clubs, nightclubs, bathhouses, and mahjong places.
- Tightening the control on tobacco advertisement and promotion
- Introducing pictorial and graphic contents to the health warnings on tobacco products.

The Hong Kong Medical Association considers that nothing short of a comprehensive ban of smoking in in-door public places will work. Separate smoking rooms are simply not viable alternatives as they are ineffective and difficult to implement. Licensing such smoking rooms is like licensing gas chambers. No ventilation can eliminate the toxic gases and particles of secondhand smoke. Partial exemption of certain trades opens many unnecessary loopholes. Phased implementation is also inequitable, as the most vulnerable employees will continue to be subjected to a deadly, and yet totally avoidable hazards in their workplaces.

Tobacco is addictive, so is tobacco-related revenue. However, evidence from different parts of the world show that smoke-free legislation is not bad for business. A comprehensive ban of smoking in indoor public places will be popular, simple, and easy to enforce. It will lead to a dramatic improvement in public health, especially in an already overcrowded, and often polluted, urban environment. Our children, pregnant mothers, many employees, and patients with heart and lung diseases will be able to breathe in cleaner air. Smokers will also benefit, because many of them will be encouraged to quit.

All the proposed measures have been put forward for public consultation ever since 2001. Each day of delay or any phased implementation will cause additional suffering and deaths among smokers and non-smokers alike and will result in huge economic loss to the Government and tax-payers. In order to safeguard the **HEALTH** of our population, we appeal to all our honorable legislators to **ACT DECISIVELY NOW**.

The Hong Kong Medical Association
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