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20/4/2004

Dr. Hon. Law Chi Kwong,
Room 601, City Bank Tower,
3, Garden Road,
Hong Kong.

Dear Sir,

Re: Select Committee on SARS

In all the enquiries into the SARS crisis, no attention seems to have been given to the medical treatment provided.

A number of significant reports have come to my attention that suggests that enquiry is necessary:

1. A (western) doctor told me that he had tried to persuade some of the doctors treating SARS to try using intravenous vitamin C: a therapy that has considerable clinical evidence of efficacy for viral infections and which is completely safe. The advice was ignored even though it could have been done without changing their prescribed treatment.
2. There were many press reports about the possibilities are using traditional Chinese herbal medicine. One reported that two doctors from China visited to offer advice but were ignored. Another, more recent press report, quoted a local doctor as saying that these treatments 'might be useful when the proper treatment was not available'. To my mind, this statement exhibits an extraordinary degree of arrogance and narrow-mindedness in a situation where orthodox therapies were clearly not completely efficacious and have left many people with permanent ill-health.
- 3 A doctor of my acquaintance told me that he had two friends in hospital with SARS. He happens to have considerable experience of a nutritional therapy that has been subjected to clinical trials with positive results for viral infections but that are not part of the western drug orthodoxy. He offered to provide this therapy free of charge to his two friends but was refused by the doctor treating them.

There are two very serious issues involved in this:

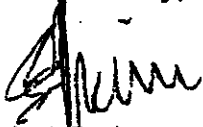
i) The treatments used in Hong Kong were chosen, not because they had been proven scientifically but because they seemed to be the best available within the knowledge of western orthodox medicine. In such a situation, alternative therapies cannot be given the usual dismissal of there being 'no scientific proof': there was none for the treatments being used and steroids are known to have serious long-term effects. In such circumstances, surely a completely open mind is mandatory and no possibility should be rejected just because it does not fit with the western orthodox paradigm.

ii) It is my understanding that a statement was made by hospital authority (or someone) that traditional Chinese medicine (or any other alternative) could only be used if the supervising doctor agreed. Surely anyone at risk of dying, should have the right to decide for themselves as to whether or not some alternative therapies should be tried. In the circumstances no doctor should be permitted to overrule the patient. If this was, indeed, the case, it is a gross infringement of human rights.

I have not had time to look into these issues in detail nor have I studied the terms of reference for your inquiry. I would, however, like to suggest you that these are serious matters and should be investigated. If it is not within your terms of reference, might I suggest that you propose a further dedicated enquiry and require that any committee of enquiry is not dominated by the orthodox western medical profession?

I venture to suggest that both of these issues need to be resolved now for the general understanding of the rights of the public but especially in case a situation similar to SARS arises in the future.

Yours faithfully,



Eric J. Spain,
Chairman,
Natural Health Association of Hong Kong.
(www.naturalhealth.org.hk)