

**Consumer Council Submission to the
LegCo Panel on Health Services on
the use of Polyacrylamide Gel for Breast Augmentation**

Introduction

1. The Consumer Council is pleased to provide views on the use of polyacrylamide gel (PAAG) for breast augmentation.

The Danger of Using PAAG for Breast Augmentation

2. The Consumer Council published an article in its monthly magazine "Choice" on 13 April 2006 on breast augmentation by injecting PAAG. Consumers were advised to seek advice from medical doctors and consider the risk concerned before receiving any reconstructive and aesthetic surgery or treatment.
3. Injecting PAAG for breast augmentation is appealing to consumers as it requires no complicated surgical procedure and its effect on breast augmentation is almost instantaneous. However, it can lead to disastrous consequences, such as numbness of injection site, breast lumps, induration, hematoma, inflammation, abscess and migration of gel. According to information provided by the Hong Kong Society of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgery, 53 women sought medical help after receiving PAAG injections, about 90% in the Mainland, 10% in Hong Kong and one case in Thailand, with the breasts being the injection site in the majority of cases. At least six of those women subsequently had their breast or breasts completely removed due to adverse body reactions to PAAG.
4. A further potential risk of PAAG is in its raw material, acrylamide monomer which is classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer as a "probable carcinogen".
5. It is impossible to use mammogram to diagnose for carcinoma of the breasts of women who had received PAAG injection. They are unsuitable candidates to consider breast feeding because of the possibility of spillage of the chemical into breast milk, which will endanger the health of their babies.

Banning the Use of PAAG as a Breast Augmentation Filler

6. The Consumer Council is concerned with the harm PAAG is likely to cause to

consumer health. The Consumer Council urges that the Government and professionals involved in reconstructive and aesthetic treatment will take steps to safeguard the well-being of consumers.

7. The Consumer Council opines that any material that is to be injected into human body should be classified as pharmaceutical product and regulated as such.
8. In view of the relatively large amount of fillers involved in breast augmentation, the complications arising from the use of PAAG can be disastrous. The Consumer Council therefore urges the authority to consider banning the use of PAAG for breast augmentation.
9. It is learnt from media reports that as at 21st April, there has been some 180 enquiries to the hotline of the Department of Health concerning PAAG. Of these, about 80 enquirers claim to have received PAAG injection for breast augmentation, and almost 40 of them have experienced complications. The Consumer Council calls upon the authorities to follow-up with these people concerned. It is also hoped that professionals attending to consumers with queries on the subject can proactively offer the needed advice. Where feasible and subject to consumer privacy safeguards, the authorities should collect more information from people who have received PAAG injection for breast augmentation, for example the venue of injection, the personnel administering the procedure, and how they came to hear about such breast augmentation injections. The information will facilitate assessment of the scale of the problem for reference in policy formulation and enforcement action where necessary.

Regulation of Breast Augmentation Fillers and Services

10. In the interest of consumer safety, the Consumer Council urges the Government to establish a regulatory mechanism for materials and procedure used in breast augmentation treatments and other reconstructive procedures and the relevant advertising claims, making reference to overseas experiences. In the long run, this can boost the confidence of visitors to Hong Kong in our reconstructive service and cosmetic industries and creating opportunities for them. On the other hand, the absence of adequate safeguards will affect consumers' confidence in such service.