Public Accounts Committee
Public Hearing
Control of Western Medicines
Speaking Notes of the Secretary for Food and Health
on 15 December 2009

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for inviting me to attend today's hearing.

2. Before the discussion of this Report, let me briefly outline the government policy on the regulation of western medicines.

3. The Government has all along attached great importance to drug safety. Ensuring patient safety and protecting public health is our top priority. For the regulation of drugs, we consider that the following principles should be adhered to:

- Firstly, the regulatory regime should be able to maintain public confidence on the usage of drugs.
- Secondly, the regulatory regime should be able to sustain and improve the standard of the pharmaceutical sector, but at the same time able to identify and address any bad practices.
- Thirdly, the regulatory regime should be fair, consistent and transparent.
- Finally, the regulatory regime has to strike a fine balance between effective regulation and avoidance of unnecessary burden on the trade.

4. Our regulatory regime has been developed on the basis of the above principles. As a matter of course, we also need to take account of the actual situation in Hong Kong in the implementation of drug regulation. For instance, with over 19,000 items of registered drugs and some 1,100 importers, exporters and wholesalers in Hong Kong, there are currently quite a large number of drug items and traders subject to regulation. Under such circumstances, we need to adopt a risk-based approach to drug regulation and target our efforts at more hazardous drugs such as dangerous drugs and poisons.

5. In fact, effective drug regulation requires the co-operation of all parties concerned. We need the collaboration of the trade in combating bad practices. At the same time, we also need the participation of the general public by refusing to buy unregistered drugs and by reporting any bad practices.

6. Earlier this year, the Government set up a Review Committee to conduct a comprehensive review of the existing drug regulatory regime. The review is in its final stage, and the report will be published shortly. The review covers a wide range of issues. Its findings will be conducive to addressing the concerns raised in the Audit Report and setting a clearer direction for the trade to raise their standards so as to ensure patient safety and protect public health. Certainly, we would be pleased to listen to the views of this Committee. With the benefit of inputs from Members, we would be able to do a better job to ensure drug safety.

7. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.