

Foreword

Professor Moira Chan-Yeung, a clinician-academic with distinguished professional life in Hong Kong and Canada, has written an insightful and fascinating account on the development and evolution of medical and health services in Hong Kong. Her first book *A Medical History of Hong Kong* covered the historical period 1842 to 2015 in two volumes, from the time of Hong Kong as a British administered territory to the period as a Special Administrative Region of China.

In this volume covering the same historical period, she has chosen to study a critical component of health systems, ambulatory care, which is frequently relegated to a secondary role in discussions involving the dominant hospital sector. The rich and analytic discourse generated from research of the literature and archival records meticulously traces the origins of ambulatory care in Hong Kong to the establishment of Chinese Public Dispensaries in 1905 in response to the 1894 plague epidemic which recurred every summer until 1930. The sociopolitical context and the leadership from civil society in the Chinese community which was instrumental for the establishment of the dispensaries are discussed. This historical origin defined the path of the continuing role of outpatient clinics in the control of infectious diseases in the subsequent decades, covering malaria, smallpox, dysentery, cholera, tuberculosis, and in more recent decades, HIV/AIDS and SARS-CoV. The insights of why health systems need to transform in response to changing needs and the dynamic environmental context is captured in the analyses of the evolution of ambulatory care to three categories of clinics—General Outpatient Clinics providing curative and preventive care, Specialist Clinics providing specialist consultations, and Special Clinics covering a range of public health interventions ranging from maternal and child, elderly, mental, and dental health to drug abuse and venereal diseases.

The changing needs arising from the demands from noncommunicable diseases and the challenges they present to the current fragmented

and segmented healthcare delivery system where most primary care is provided in the private sector is a consequence of under-investments in the appropriate modalities of primary care in the public sector are identified and highlighted. A system response to the challenges will need to examine how to improve access to preventive care and chronic disease management in ambulatory health services, and the role of the private sector in these health services. The book is a narrative of how our past defines our present and which will inform our future, to recreate a health system fit-for-purpose for the 21st century.

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Preface

There is a wealth of material on the development of medical and health services in Hong Kong. In the book *A Medical History of Hong Kong*, in two volumes, 1842 to 1941 and 1942 to 2015, I presented a broad sweeping view of the development and evolution of medical and health services in Hong Kong, covering key events as its status toggled from a British colony to an occupied territory under Japanese administration, back again to a British colony, and finally to a Special Administrative Region of China. Not surprisingly, the development of Hong Kong's medical and health services is just as tumultuous.

In the previously published two-volume book, *A Medical History of Hong Kong*, the history of development of medical and health services in Hong Kong from 1842 to 2015 was arranged by themes rather than in chronological order, so that each subject could be discussed thoroughly in a coherent manner. Such a presentation, focusing on the selected topics of interest, would necessarily leave out others perhaps equally important.

The present book addresses an area that is seldom discussed, despite its immeasurable impact on the health of the citizens of Hong Kong: the development of outpatient medical services or ambulatory services and their advancement outside the hospital setting. This work highlights public health measures, implemented through general outpatient and special clinics, such as maternal and child health, school health, mental health, industrial health, and elderly health services. This book also chronicles the unique contribution of outpatient services to the control of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and venereal diseases. Together with inpatient hospital services, outpatient services have helped improve the health indices of the people of Hong Kong to become one of the best in the world.

Before 1990, under the Medical and Health Department, there were three types of outpatient clinics: general outpatient clinics, special outpatient clinics, and specialist clinics. The first two types of clinics were

developed outside hospital settings: the general outpatient clinics were the same general outpatient clinics (GOPCs) as we know them today; the special clinics included those that dealt with maternal and child health, school health, industrial health, tuberculosis, venereal diseases, dental clinics, drug abuse, mental health, industrial health, and elderly health. The third group, the specialist clinics, was outpatient departments of hospitals, and they delivered specialists' care of various medical specialties, such as medicine, surgery, gynecology, obstetrics, orthopedics, and others. With rapid medical advances, more specialization and subspecialization took place, and more specialist clinical services were available. Since the 1970s, polyclinics were built in different districts to accommodate specialist outpatient clinics, and later still, specialist outpatient centers were built, such as Tang Chi Ngong Specialist Clinics. Although the contribution of specialist clinics to the health of Hong Kong people is significant, it will not be discussed in this book.

In 1989, the Medical and Health Department was dissolved and replaced by a new Department of Health and a Department of Hospital Services. The latter became the Hospital Authority the following year to manage all the government hospitals and subvented hospitals in Hong Kong, while a new Department of Health was formed to take responsibility for the rest of health services. Outpatient services were also restructured. The Hospital Authority would administer the specialist outpatient clinics in hospitals, polyclinics, and specialist outpatient centers. The general outpatient clinics and special clinics would remain under the jurisdiction of the Department of Health. In 2003, however, fifty-four general outpatient clinics were transferred from the Department of Health to the Hospital Authority in order to integrate primary and secondary healthcare, thus ensuring continuity of patient care, as well as facilitating the formation of family medicine training units.

The general outpatient clinics are simple and do not need high-tech equipment. They concentrate on the provision of basic curative measures and disease prevention. They have been highly cost-effective in improving Hong Kong's health status, but their profound influence on the health of the population has often been underestimated and unappreciated. Regarding present-day pandemics of chronic noncommunicable diseases, including cancer and dementia, which carry high morbidity and mortality, the risks for these diseases can be lowered by preventive measures and their morbidity reduced by early detection. General outpatient clinics

are in a unique position in preventing these diseases. However, these general outpatient clinics in the public sector only provide 15% to 20% of all primary care services in Hong Kong. The private sector, which is responsible for the bulk of primary care will have to be engaged in the program for prevention of chronic noncommunicable diseases to be successful.

This book draws on a wide array of archival materials, government publications, scholarly literature, newspapers, and online resources, the details of which can be found in Bibliography.

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