



嚴重急性呼吸系統綜合症專家委員會  
SARS Expert Committee

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2 October 2003

The Honourable Tung Chee Hwa  
Chief Executive  
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Main Wing  
Central Government Offices  
Lower Albert Road  
Hong Kong

Dear Chief Executive,

**“SARS in Hong Kong: From Experience to Action”**

We are pleased, on behalf of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) Expert Committee (the Committee), to submit our report “SARS in Hong Kong: From Experience to Action”.

First, we wish to express our admiration for the courage and dignity shown by the people of Hong Kong during the SARS outbreak. To those who were bereaved we offer our sincere condolences.

We also wish to express our deep respect for the healthcare workers of Hong Kong. Their selfless dedication, professionalism and sacrifice were an example to others.

The more our Committee learnt about the experience of SARS in Hong Kong, the more impressed we were by the extraordinary service, hard work, attention to duty and acceptance of responsibility shown by numerous people during the outbreak. This impression was reinforced by many comments from senior people in our own countries.

We are aware of the concerns expressed by some that the Committee's deliberations would not be independent of government or other interests. We wish to make it clear that the intention of every member of the Committee has been, and continues to be, to do his or her best for the people of Hong Kong. We attach great importance to our independence and the transparency in which the investigation was undertaken. Our integrity requires that the enclosed report represents our collective opinions and judgments alone.

We have examined a considerable amount of information and evidence presented to the Committee through submissions and meetings with people from a wide variety of backgrounds. We have asked that this body of information be made available through a website, where it is possible to do so without infringing an individual's right to confidentiality. Details are available in the report.

We did not identify any individual who we deemed to be culpable of negligence, lack of diligence or maladministration in the handling of the SARS epidemic. In reaching this judgement, we were fully aware of the hazards of retrospective judgment, and therefore made efforts in each instance to put ourselves in the context of what was known, and what could have been done, at the time. It is always easy to criticise with the benefit of retrospective knowledge and hindsight. SARS was a new and emerging disease. We therefore considered it fair and reasonable in our evaluation to assess critically the decision-making process and decisions taken against the knowledge and information available at the particular time.

There is, of course, a proper role for retrospective knowledge and hindsight. They are important in drawing lessons from experience, and in making recommendations on areas of improvement to better prepare the system for any future outbreak. It is the purpose of this report to identify such lessons and, where appropriate, make recommendations on what should be done urgently, and what should be done in the longer term. There is no doubt in our view that there were system failures in the response to the epidemic, particularly in the early phase. Lessons must be learnt and there is much that needs to be done to strengthen the public health function, to improve the coordination of the different parts of the health sector, to provide clarity in roles and responsibilities and to improve communications.

There are lessons also for the international community. Epidemics respect neither geographical nor national boundaries. As people live in an increasingly inter-connected world, local health problems are now global problems, and global problems are local problems. We attach considerable importance to our observations on the need to regard the whole of the Pearl River Delta as a single system as far as health protection is concerned.

For the rest of the world, Hong Kong's health system represents an important line of defence against the outbreak of new infectious diseases. Given that inter-connections within the world community are clearly linked with the interests of the people of Hong Kong, we hope that this report will also provide a useful reference for the international community.

As the title of our report emphasises, we believe it is important that those recommendations that are accepted are followed through to implementation. We strongly advise that an annual review of progress be undertaken and reported to the public.

In keeping with the importance we attach to the independence and transparency of this review, we are making the report available to the public at the same time as it is presented to you.

Yours sincerely,



Sir Cyril Chantler



Prof Sian Griffiths, OBE

Co-chairs of the  
SARS Expert Committee

Encl.