

## Association of Private Medical Specialists of Hong Kong Limited

香港私人執業專科醫生協會有限公司

Room 1602, 16/F, Central Building, 1-3 Pedder Street, Central, Hong Kong

香港中環畢打街1至3號中環大廈16樓1602室

Tel 電話: (852) 2526-6081

Fax 傳真: (852) 2845-2513

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Dr Yeoh Eng Kiong, JP  
Secretary for Health & Welfare  
Health & Welfare Bureau  
19/F Murray Building  
Garden Rd, C, HK

Dear Dr Yeoh

**SARS Epidemic**

The Association of Private Medical Specialists realizes that SARS is a new disease and that efforts to control it were handicapped by the lack of adequate knowledge when it first broke out. Nevertheless, we note that there was a four-month gap between its first outbreak in Guangdong and its first spread to Hong Kong. During this period, Hong Kong could have acquired reasonable knowledge of the disease to be forewarned. We regret that despite warning from various sources early in the outbreak, the Government chose not to take stringent precautions against the spread of the virus until the Amoy Gardens episode broke out. Instead, the Government kept emphasizing the absence of community acquired cases. As a result, the general population remained slack with precautions against the spreading and acquiring of the disease. We lament the fact that during this period, three of our members contracted the disease from their patients. Two of them succumbed, while the third is still in critical condition.

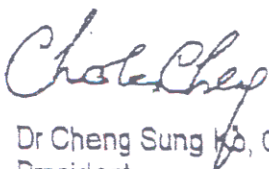
We note that Vietnam, despite its economic handicap, contained the disease much more efficiently than Hong Kong, and that the country had no better knowledge about the disease than we.

We also note that many members of the healthcare service contracted the disease. From the hospitals involved, there was an outcry over inadequacy in both equipment and training in dealing with highly infectious diseases SARS in particular. We believe they had a genuine cause for concern, and we regret that the Government ignored their cry for a long time.

Since there are three committees currently investigating the issue, we have decided to wait for their reports before forming a final opinion on the possibility of mismanagement. Meanwhile, we believe that appointing the Secretary for Health, Welfare & Environment to investigate his own Bureau is not within the spirit of accountability and is opened to criticism.

In recent years, the bird flu, Dengue fever and SARS are three epidemics that have spread from Guangdong to Hong Kong. It would be a reasonable assumption that more will come in the future. We note that co-operation between Guangzhou and Hong Kong led to the successful identification of the SARS virus. We call for extra alert to guard against the further spread of epidemics to Hong Kong. We recommend the establishment of a cross-border standing committee, with a high-level hotline, to facilitate urgent co-operation on epidemic issues between Guangdong and Hong Kong.

Yours sincerely



Dr Cheng Sung Ho, Charles  
President