

DH/CR/PUB/30  
SARS/HMAG/04

7 July 2003

Secretary, SARS Experts Committee  
Room 1808, Murray Building  
Garden Road  
Hong Kong  
(Attn.: Mr. Patrick Nip)

Dear Patrick,

**Allegations made by Professor Sydney Chung**

Thank you for inviting me to respond to the allegations against the Department of Health (DH) and myself made by Prof Chung in his letter dated 25 June 2003.

2. Prof Chung made the following comments and allegations against DH and me -
- (a) during the first meeting between the hospital management and the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) on 12 March, faculty members warned of the need to close the Princess of Wales Hospital (PWH);
  - (b) DH was making every effort to downplay the seriousness of the situation (14 March);
  - (c) he was frustrated with the lack of progress of the epidemiological investigations by DH (19 March); and
  - (d) in a letter on 19 March, he raised concerns on infection of contacts that had never been to PWH and urged me to urgently consider all possible measures including quarantine of patients and contacts. He did not receive a reply from me.

3. I should first refer members of the SARS Expert Committee to the earlier papers provided by DH which set out a detailed account of DH's efforts in March and which should address Prof Chung's concerns. I would however stress the following points -

- (a) at no time did CUHK raise the issue of closure of hospital with DH;
- (b) Prof Chung has provided no evidence to substantiate his allegation that DH was making every effort to downplay the seriousness of the situation. DH alerted WHO and the community of an unusual outbreak on 12 March and the latter issued a global alert on the same day. The Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food provided daily briefings on the situation to keep the public informed of the developing situation. As the professor has noted, there was little knowledge of the disease. We could only tell people what we knew;
- (c) Prof Chung was aware that Community Physician (NTE) [CP(NTE)] had regular liaison with the senior hospital management at PWH. Epidemiological findings were updated regularly and shared with PWH. I understand from CP(NTE) that Prof Chung did not once raise questions on our epidemiological investigations; and
- (d) CP(NTE) is ranked at directorate level.

4. When Prof Chung spoke with me over the telephone in the evening on 19 March, I had before me a copy of his letter of the same date. There was no disagreement on taking all possible measures to stop the outbreak.

5. Prof Chung asked if I could remove someone from home if he was suspected to be suffering from SARS. I told him that SARS had not been included in the law yet. But I confirmed that if he had reasons to believe that someone was suffering from an infectious disease, I was sure that I could do something if he reported it to me. He became very emotional and cried. He said that it was too late because MM, a staff of PWH, and his relatives had all been admitted to hospital. According to him, MM refused to stay away from home when he had symptoms.

6. As I had explained the position to Prof Chung, I thought that no written reply was called for. I am sorry for the misunderstanding. I believe you would make available to him a copy of this letter.

7. I have subsequently asked my colleagues to follow up on the three cases mentioned in Prof Chung's letter of 19 March. The cases had already been dealt with or were being followed up at the time.

8. Since Prof Chung specifically mentioned the case of MM, I think it would be useful to provide a summary response below -

MM was screened at the special staff clinic at PWH on 11 March and discharged. As explained in our earlier papers, PWH was responsible for monitoring its own staff. It was unfortunate that when his health condition deteriorated after 11 March, the matter was not reported to DH until he was hospitalized on 17 March. By then, he had infected other members of his family.

9. I would be happy to elaborate on any points which members may be interested at tomorrow's session.

Yours sincerely,

SIGNED

( Dr Margaret Chan )  
Director of Health