

## EDITORIAL



EDITOR

Dr. Lam Tai Pong

DEPUTY EDITORS

Dr. John T.N. Chung

Dr. Wong Hung Wai

BOARDMEMBERS

Dr. Cynthia S.Y. Chan Dr. Augustine T. Lam

Dr. Eddie T. Chan Dr. Bernard W.K. Lau

Dr. David V.K. Chao Dr. Peter C.Y. Lee

Dr. Betty K.M. Kwan Dr. Glenn K.L. Lee

Dr. Kwok Kon Hung Dr. John Mackay

Dr. Cindy L.K. Lam Dr. David Owens

BUSINESS MANAGER

Dr. Ip Kit Kuen

ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER

Ms. Teresa Lee

HONORARY CONTRIBUTING EDITORIAL  
CONSULTANTS

Dr. Cindy S.T. Aun – *Anaesthesia & Intensive Care*

Dr. Augustine F. Cheng – *Microbiology*

Prof. Tony Dixon – *Family Medicine*

Prof. Wes Fabb – *Family Medicine*

Prof. S.T. Fan – *Surgery*

Prof. A. Hedley – *Community Medicine*

Prof. Walter W.K. King – *Surgery*

Prof. C.R. Kumana – *Clinical Pharmacology*

Dr. C.P. Lau – *Medicine*

Prof. S.H. Lee – *Community Medicine*

Prof. P.C. Leung – *Orthopaedic Surgery*

Dr. Mak Ki Yan – *Psychiatry*

Dr. C.W. Ogle – *Pharmacology*

Dr. Grace Tang – *Obstetrics & Gynaecology*

Prof. Mark Tso – *Ophthalmology*

Prof. C.A. Van Hasselt – *Otorhinolaryngology*

Dr. C.K. Wong – *Psychiatry*

Prof. Jean Woo – *Medicine*

Prof. C.Y. Yeung – *Paediatrics*

Prof. R.T.T. Young – *Medicine*

The Hong Kong College of General Practitioners

Tel.: 2528 6618 (2 lines) Fax: 2866 0616

8th Floor, Duke of Windsor Building,

15 Hennessy Road, Hong Kong.

Printed & Designed by

Printhouse Production Center

HONG KONG

## Is Men's Health Another Neglected Health Issue?

A little over a year ago, I wrote in this column on the women's health,<sup>1</sup> an issue which is a well recognised health topic and receives a certain degree of government and medical attention. This is reflected by the government's and medical personnel's efforts in setting up Well Women Clinics and promoting women's health in hospitals, at primary care level as well as in the community.

There is no doubt that women suffer from unique physical, psychological and social problems. They deserve special attention so that their specific health problems are identified and managed appropriately.

I think there are strong grounds to argue that men suffer from unique physical, psychological and social problems which also require special attention.

It is well known to every doctor that men suffer from unique genitourinary tract problems. Benign prostatic hyperplasia is common among men over 60. Prostatic cancer causes significant morbidity and mortality.<sup>2</sup> Many men also suffer from specific male sexual dysfunctioning. These are problems which are uniquely male because of the male anatomical structure. However, they are only a relatively small part of the male health problem.

Men are also more likely to suffer from ischaemic heart disease, smoking related diseases and injury which may be the result of their lifestyle and occupational hazards.

What is really causing major men's health problems is often related to delay in seeking health care.<sup>3,4</sup> Men often ignore health warning signs whereas women seem to be more ready to consult their doctors for worrying symptoms. This may be one of the many reasons why women live longer than men in many parts of the world. Hong Kong is no exception. In 1991, the expectation of life at birth was 80.6 years for females and only 75.1 for males.

When it comes to psychosocial health problems, men are even more reluctant to seek help. It could be more of a problem in Hong Kong than other Western countries as traditional Chinese culture does not encourage the male bread winners to disclose psychosocial needs to a third person, whether it is to their own family members or a professional health care worker. It may be seen as a sign of being "weak". It is contrary to how men are expected to withhold their emotions and tough it out.

## Editorial

We are experiencing an economic downturn in Hong Kong. Unemployment and under-employment levels are at an 11-year high. The bio-psycho-social effects of unemployment and underemployment are enormous,<sup>5-6</sup> and they are by no means exclusive to men. However, these problems are likely to be even more serious if the unemployed is the major income earner of the family. It is more likely to be a man than a woman in most families. According to Hong Kong Government's statistics, two thirds of the unemployed are men.<sup>7</sup> The importance of "total-person" care cannot be over-emphasized in such individuals. However, since men are generally more reluctant to seek medical help, particularly with issues which have psycho-social origins, their illnesses are more likely to be identified late and more difficult to manage.

Men's health is neglected, it needs government and medical attention. The public, both males and females, need to be aware of the specific health problems which are predominantly male so that they will present their problems to their doctors early. Doctors also need to be well trained so that they are competent in dealing with men's health. ■

## References

1. Lam TP. Women's Health. *Hong Kong Practitioner*. 1994; 16(9): 433-434.
2. Bloom JR. Early Detection of Cancer. *Cancer* 1994; 74: 1464-1473
3. Konen JC. Men's Health Issues. *Arch Fam Med* 1993; 2: 917-919
4. Clearihan L. Men's Health: Myth and Reality. *Aust Fam Phy* 1993; 22(8): 1317.
5. Bartley M. Unemployment and ill health: understanding the relationship. *J Epi Community Health*. 1994; 48(4): 333-337.
6. Dirksen ME. Unemployment: more than the loss of a job. *Am Asso of Occ Health Nurse Journal*. 1994; 42(10): 468-476.
7. Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong Government. Quarterly Report on General Household Survey, April to June 1995.

Lam Tai Pong  
Editor