

Speech by CS at Symposium on Cancer Challenge in Hong Kong (English only)

Following is the speech by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, at the Symposium on Cancer Challenge in Hong Kong today (October 6):

Dr Leong (President of the Hong Kong Anti-Cancer Society, Dr Leong Che-hung), Mrs Chu (Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Hong Kong Anti-Cancer Society, Mrs Patricia Chu), HRH Princess Dina (President of the Union for International Cancer Control, Princess Dina Mired), Sophia (Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan), distinguished speakers, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. It is my honour to join you at this Symposium. First and foremost, my warmest welcome to all the speakers, experts, guests and participants from abroad. I would also like to congratulate the Hong Kong Anti-Cancer Society on staging this meaningful and important event, not only for the medical professions but also for the betterment of public health in Hong Kong.

The theme of this Symposium is "Sustainable Cancer Control Plan for Hong Kong". It goes without saying that cancer is a public health threat and challenge nowadays. According to the World Health Organization, cancer is the second leading cause of death across the globe, causing about 9.6 million deaths in 2018. In other words, about one in six deaths worldwide are attributable to cancer. Worse still, the number of new cases is expected to rise by about 60 per cent within the next 20 years given the ageing population globally.

In Hong Kong, cancer claimed over 14 300 lives in 2017 or nearly one-third of total deaths, and has ranked top among all fatal diseases for many decades. We are mindful that both the high mortality rate and the number of new cancer cases are on the rise, mainly because of the ageing population and changes in lifestyle. The adverse implications of this growing trend on the healthcare system and economic development should not be underrated.

What can we do to tackle the problem? As the old saying goes, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure". In 2001, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government established the Cancer Coordinating Committee (CCC), chaired by the Secretary for Food and Health, to steer the direction of work and advise on the strategies on cancer prevention and control. The membership of the Committee comprises experts, academics, doctors and professionals from both public and private sectors in the field. A Cancer Expert Working Group on Cancer Prevention and Screening set up under the CCC is tasked to regularly keep track of local and international scientific evidence and formulate evidence-based responses to local circumstances.

Scientific evidence also shows that unhealthy lifestyles, particularly high consumption of red and processed meat, inadequate fruit and vegetable intake, physical inactivity, smoking and alcohol consumption, are key risk factors for developing cancer. Indeed, about 40 per cent of cancer deaths can be prevented by modifying or avoiding the aforesaid factors. To promote a healthy lifestyle, the HKSAR Government this year introduced "Towards 2025: Strategy and Action Plan to Prevent and Control Non-communicable Diseases in Hong Kong". The target is to reduce the risk of premature deaths caused by key non-communicable diseases, including cancer, by 25 per cent.

Furthermore, early detection and diagnosis of cancer is another of the most effective means to lower mortality and reduce suffering during treatment. To this end, we have so far launched three territory-wide science-based screening programmes, namely the Cervical Screening Programme for women aged from 25 to 64, the Colorectal Cancer Screening Programme for people aged from 50 to 75 and the Community Care Fund Pilot Scheme on Subsidised Cervical Cancer Screening and Preventive Education for Eligible Low-income Women, to strengthen our efforts to reach out to women in need.

While the HKSAR Government is committed to preventing proliferation of cancer in the community, we need the concerted and persistent support of the entire community, including the Hong Kong Anti-Cancer Society, in this uphill battle. While there is steady improvement in cancer cure and control in areas such as breast cancer and thyroid cancer, we need relentless support from all quarters of society for substantial and continuous improvement in cancer care, cancer control and prevention.

On this note, I would like to express my sincerest appreciation again to the Hong Kong Anti-Cancer Society for its staunch support in promoting cancer prevention and cancer care over the past 50 years. This Symposium indeed provides a valuable platform for government representatives, non-governmental organisations, professional bodies, academic institutes and private corporations to share their experience and latest know-how in furtherance of a sustainable cancer control plan for Hong Kong.

I wish the Symposium every success, all of participants a fruitful discussion and our overseas visitors an enjoyable stay in Hong Kong.

Thank you.