

Submission to Hospital Authority Panel on SARS Outbreak by Sr. Catherine Wu  
Regional Advisory Committee member of Kowloon

Having attended both the Kowloon Regional Advisory Committee and the CMC Hospital Governing Committee meetings I come to understanding better the many activities undertaken by the Hospital authority and the three cluster hospitals to handle the SARS situation,.

I must say that a lot of hard work has been done to meet the rapid and changing demands caused by SARS. The staff from the management to the front line should be commended. The situation was difficult due to many uncertainties in handling the virus. .

Though the media are good and strong tools to help HK to be on the alert and to be accountable to the public they have unfortunately also caused confusion. The Hospital Authority does not have a strong PR to handle all the uncertainties to allay fear.. Panic caused by fear and the mistrust of the Government has caused a chain effect which needs a lot of explanations to mend the gap especially when deaths of dear ones. occurred.

I think the lack of alertness, foresight and the delaying attitude of the HK government has started a chain of mistrust, suspicion , lots of guesswork by the public and the withholding of information by government had altogether aggravated panic. The withholding of information by government was for a good intention, to lessen panic amongst the population but did this help? It would have been better to allay the people's fear by prompt and transparent admission e.g. frank enough to admit that there were not sufficient protective garments due to shortage of supply and to give information about the various housing estates that were affected etc. This is where a strong PR should have stepped in to help and not left to the medical profession to handle as they are already loaded with work.

Each hospital has its Infection Control unit and some of them handle the SARS situation more successfully than others. There is something to learn from here! It is never too late to learn. Education to the public should continue to avoid further disaster of this type in the future. .

Lastly I would like to pay tribute to the professionalism of the health care workers at the frontline in struggling round the clock to provide patient care and to save lives. during a period of high stress and at risk to themselves..