



食物環境衛生署
Food and Environmental
Hygiene Department

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Pest Control Advisory
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Our Ref.: FEHD/FPH/ 10/110

Your Ref. : CB2/SC2

Miss Flora TAI

19 April 2004

Clerk to Select Committee to inquire into the
handling of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
outbreak by the Government and the Hospital Authority
Legislative Council
8 Jackson Road, Hong Kong
(Fax: 2248 2011)

Dear Miss TAI

Select Committee to inquire into the handling of
the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome outbreak by
the Government and the Hospital Authority

Thank you for your letter of 8 April 2004.

My written statement in respect of the meeting on 5 April 2003 is attached together with a
copy of my curriculum vitae (which set out my qualifications and experience) for the Select
Committee's reference.

Yours sincerely,

(Yuen Ming-chi)

Pest Control Officer In-charge

Statement to the Select Committee to Inquire into the Handling of the Severe Acute
Respiratory Syndrome Outbreak by the Government and the Hospital Authority

Submitted by Mr. Yuen Ming-chi

19 April 2004

1. As part of its normal function, the Pest Control Advisory Section of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department has been carrying out surveillance work on rodents by capturing rodents for examinations. Autopsies are carried out on rodents captured and blood samples are taken for test on rodent-borne diseases such as plague and Hantaan fever infection on the same day. If any abnormality is observed on the viscera of a rodent, the rodent will be sent to the laboratory of the Department of Health for further examination. The staff of the Pest Control Advisory Section completes all the work on the rodents on the day the rodents are collected and the animals are not kept overnight. During the SARS outbreak, since 2 April 2003, trapping of rats had been carried out in the Amoy Gardens for collection of rats for examinations.
2. I received a phone call from a lady at around 11:00 a.m. on 5 April 2003. The lady said that she was from the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau. She told me that the Bureau would like to discuss with me some rodent problem and asked me to go to the meeting room at 19/F of the Murray Building, Central as soon as possible then. When I arrived at the meeting, everyone including Dr. Yeoh and Dr. Ellis was sitting in the room. I was the last one to arrive at the meeting.
3. When I arrived at the meeting, Dr. Saw told me that positive results for coronavirus had been obtained from the tests on the rat droppings. The attendees talked about the role of rats in transmitting the disease for a while. Dr. Stephen Ng indicated that he considered that the transmission of SARS in Amoy Gardens should be caused by rats by using a chart showing the number of SARS cases in Amoy Gardens each day. Dr. Yeoh had not indicated that he agreed or disagreed with the opinion of Dr. Ng. Dr. Yeoh and Dr. Saw asked me what kinds of rats could be found in Hong Kong and the behaviour of rats. Upon their enquiries, I briefed the attendees on the types of rats commonly found in the urban areas (namely, sewer rats and roof rats) and the behaviour of these rats.
4. When I told members that 4 rats had been captured from Amoy Gardens on

that day (5 April 2003), Dr Yeoh asked Dr. Ellis to carry out autopsies on the rats captured immediately. As the rats were in the laboratory of the Pest Control Advisory Section at Shamshuipo at that time, I asked Dr. Ellis to arrange some staff to collect the rats from the laboratory. Dr Ellis then left the meeting.

5. I had mentioned in the meeting that trapping and poisonous baiting were the methods used for controlling rat. Acute poison had not been used in Hong Kong for many years. I had told the attendees that rat problem could be as serious as having a few hundred rats in a small area. I quoted an example of having collected some 400 rats within 2 weeks from the Central Market in year 1997. I told the attendees that I had inspected Amoy Gardens and found that the rat problem in Amoy Gardens was not serious. I had not told the attendees that there were at least 400 rats around Amoy Gardens. I cannot recall any discussion on the ramifications of the spread of SARS by rats.
6. I briefed the attendees on the behaviour of rats, local rat problem and technique in investigation on rats etc. Dr. Yeoh had asked attendees not to release the preliminary results on the examination of rats as more tests would be conducted. Attendees agreed that the preliminary results on the examination of rats should not be released to the public. Dr. Yeoh asked me to continue the trapping of rats for examination and to trap rats from areas around Amoy Gardens as well. I suggested extending the trapping area to include Lower Ngau Tau Kok Estate and Telford Gardens and Dr. Yeoh agreed. Dr. Yeoh did not send someone to call Dr. Ellis to stop Dr. Ellis performing the autopsies on rats after Dr. Ellis had left the meeting.
7. Discussion on evacuation of all the residents of Amoy Gardens had not been made during my presence at the meeting. Dr. Yeoh did not make any statement to the effect that the residents of Amoy Gardens would have to be sacrificed. [This is to adopt the wordings used in question 10 below.]
8. There was no discussion on warning people to keep their premises rat free in the meeting. I had not noticed Dr. Ng making the suggestion on warning people to keep their premises rat-safe by closing windows and covering their food in the meeting.
9. I had not worked with Dr. Ng including the investigation into the outbreak at Amoy Gardens. Dr. Ng stayed until the end of the meeting on 5 April 2003 and we all left the room together after the meeting. After the meeting on 5 April 2003, I

had neither contacted Dr. Lo nor Dr. Ng in April 2003. I do not know Dr. Lo has called Dr. Ng on 8 April 2003.

10. To complete the picture, the Pest Control Advisory Section of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department continued to dissect, obtain specimens and carry out examinations on the rat trapped after 5 April 2003 as part of the investigations into the Amoy Gardens outbreak.

Response to the issues:

1. When were the attendees told of the test results of the rat droppings and throat swab and what was their reaction?

Ans.: When I arrived at the meeting, Dr Saw told me that positive results for coronavirus had been obtained from the tests on the rat droppings. The attendees talked about the role of rat in transmitting the disease. Dr. Stephen NG said that the transmission of SARS in Amoy Gardens should be caused by rats by using a chart showing the number of SARS cases in Amoy Gardens each day. Dr. Yeoh and Dr Saw asked me on the behaviour of rats.

2. Who sent Dr Trevor ELLIS to perform the autopsies on rats trapped the night before?

Ans: Dr. Yeoh.

3. When did Dr Yeoh join the meeting?

Ans.: Dr. Yeoh was already in the meeting room when I arrived at the meeting.

4. When did Mr. Yuen arrive at the meeting? Was he summoned to the meeting by Dr Yeoh? If yes, why was he summoned to the meeting?

Ans.: I received a phone call from a lady at around 11:00 a.m. on 5 April 2003 and arrived at the meeting at around 12:00 noon. The lady said that she was from the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau. The Bureau would like to discuss with me some rodent problem.

5. Was there any discussion on the ramifications of the spread of SARS by rats?

Ans.: I cannot recall any discussion on the ramifications of the spread of SARS by rats. I do not recall Dr. Yeoh expressed the fear that there might be riots in Hong Kong when I was there at the meeting.

6. Was there any discussion on the killing of rats?

Ans.: Yes. I had briefed the attendees the methods of rats control used in Hong Kong. Dr Yeoh did not give instruction to kill rats.

7. Did Dr. Ng suggest that rats which were virus positive should be kept alive to observe how long the virus stayed active in them?

Ans.: I cannot recall whether Dr. Ng had made the suggestion. No discussion was made on keeping rats which were virus positive alive to observe how long the virus stayed active in them.

8. Was there any discussion on what to say to the public about the investigation on rats? Did Dr. Yeoh give instruction to stop the investigation on rats?

Ans.: Dr. Yeoh asked attendees not to release the preliminary results on the examination of rats as more tests would be conducted. Attendees agreed that the preliminary results on the examination of rats should not be released to the public. Dr. Yeoh did not give instruction to stop the investigation on rats.

9. Did Dr. Yeoh request everyone at the meeting to keep the rat findings confidential? Did Dr. Yeoh send someone to call Dr. Ellis to stop performing the autopsies on rats?

Ans.: Dr. Yeoh asked attendees not to release the preliminary results on the examination of rats as more tests would be conducted. Dr. Yeoh did not send someone to call Dr. Ellis to stop performing the autopsies on rats.

10. Was there any discussion on the evacuation of all the residents of Amoy Gardens? Did Dr. Yeoh make any statement to the effect that the residents of Amoy Gardens would have to be sacrificed?

Ans.: Discussion on evacuation of all the residents of Amoy Gardens had not been made during my presence at the meeting. Dr. Yeoh did not make any statement to

the effect that the residents of Amoy Gardens would have to be sacrificed.

11. Did Dr. Ng suggest warning people to keep their premises rat-safe by closing windows and covering their food? Was Dr. Ng involved in the investigation into the outbreak at Amoy Gardens? Did Dr. Ng stay until the end of the meeting on 5 April 2003?

Ans.: There was no discussion on warning people to keep their premises rat-safe. I had not noticed Dr. Ng making the suggestion on warning people to keep their premises rat-safe by closing windows and covering their food in the meeting. I had not worked with Dr. Ng on the investigation into the outbreak at Amoy Gardens. Dr. Ng stayed until the end of the meeting on 5 April 2003.

12. What was the purpose of Dr. Lo's call to Dr. Ng on 8 April 2003?

Ans.: I do not know Dr. Lo has called Dr. Ng on 8 April 2003.