

Proposal on Welfare Support Policies for Adults with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Introduction to Hong Kong Let's Talk ADHD Association

Hong Kong Let's Talk ADHD Association (after this referred to as the "Association") is a registered non-profit charitable organization committed to enhancing public awareness and understanding of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Our Association is dedicated to providing comprehensive support to individuals and families affected by this condition while advocating for equal opportunities. Through educational, research, training, and collaborative initiatives, we strive to build a brighter future for the ADHD community in Hong Kong.

Preamble

In recent years, the recognition and understanding of ADHD in adults have been steadily growing in Hong Kong. This shift in awareness can be attributed to the introduction of the 5th edition of the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 2013. This edition included explicit criteria for adolescent and adult symptoms of ADHD, shedding light on the prevalence of this condition among adults.

Studies have shown that approximately 65%¹ of individuals with ADHD will continue to exhibit symptoms into adulthood. However, adult ADHD symptoms often differ from those experienced in childhood and can be easily mistaken for symptoms of other conditions, such as depression or anxiety.² This complicates the diagnosis process and may contribute to untreated ADHD in adults. Furthermore, the societal stigma surrounding mental health issues can also discourage individuals from seeking proper support and treatment.

8 Key Insights on Adult ADHD in Hong Kong

1. Significant Undiagnosed ADHD Population

Recent data from 2022 suggests a notable prevalence of ADHD across various age groups in Hong Kong. Specifically, in the study conducted by Hong Kong University, School of Medicine, the incidence rate estimated around 6.4%³ among children and adolescents (ages 5-19 years old) and approximately 2.5%³ in adults (age 20+ years). Based on population census of Hong Kong in 2022, the projection of individuals with ADHD in Hong Kong may reach 210,000⁴, including over 50,000 children and adolescents and about 157,000 adults.

However, Hospital Authority statistics from 2022/23 indicate only 21,300⁵ diagnosed ADHD patients sought psychiatric treatment in public hospitals that year - 17,500 children (ages 5-17 years old) and approximately 3,800 adults (age 18+ years). This large discrepancy between projected cases and treated patients highlights a potentially significant gap, suggesting many undiagnosed ADHD cases. Without proper diagnosis and care, these individuals may face challenges in daily life. More research is needed to precisely determine ADHD prevalence and connect patients to appropriate support and treatment.

2. Narrow public knowledge of ADHD perpetuates stigma

In Hong Kong, the general understanding of ADHD remains rudimentary. Many people hold misconceptions, viewing ADHD merely as a childhood behavioural issue rather than a condition that can persist into adulthood. These misunderstandings, stemming from a lack of knowledge or stereotypes, can lead to unnecessary discrimination or misconceptions in workplaces or and daily life. This not only affects the mental well-being of individuals with ADHD but can also hinder their professional growth.

3. Lack of Adequate Medical Support

Hong Kong's public healthcare system, particularly its mental health services for ADHD patients, is under significant strain. Wait times for initial appointments are often prolonged, potentially exacerbating conditions or leading to other mental health issues². While private healthcare can offer quicker support, the associated costs can be prohibitive for many families.

For instance, Queen Mary Hospital, one of Hong Kong's primary healthcare providers, has an opaque and hard-to-access adult ADHD department. Unless referred by relevant entities, general patients find it challenging to locate this information on the hospital's official website. This makes it difficult for patients seeking help and might also cause them to miss optimal treatment opportunities.

4. Scarcity of Resources for Adult ADHD

ADHD is often viewed as solely as a childhood condition, leading to inadequate focus and allocation of resources focusing on adult ADHD. With the majority of research, awareness campaigns, and treatment resources tailored to children, adults with ADHD face a lack of specialised information and professional support.

This poses challenges for adult ADHD patients seeking assistance. They might struggle to find specialized doctors or treatment centres, equipped for their needs. Additionally, societal misconceptions that ADHD ends in childhood can lead to misunderstandings and discrimination against adults with ADHD in daily life and the workplace.

5. Limited Awareness of Patient Rights

Many patients with ADHD are not fully informed about their rights concerning their condition. They may be unaware that ADHD is protected under the "Disability Discrimination Ordinance," leaving them unprepared to address related issues. For instance, they might not know they can apply for a "Disability Registration Card."

Moreover, when facing unfair treatment, they might not realize they can lodge complaints with the Equal Opportunities Commission to seek justice and protect their rights. This lack of awareness can leave patients feeling more vulnerable and lost when confronted with challenges.

6. Insufficient Professional Training on Adult ADHD

There's a noticeable gap in professional training and knowledge dissemination about adult ADHD in the medical and mental health sectors. Many doctors and mental health experts may not have received adequate training on adult ADHD-related courses during their education, resulting in a lack of in-depth understanding of the condition. Furthermore, some professionals may still hold outdated beliefs, mistakenly thinking ADHD is only a childhood issue and overlooking the fact that adults can also be affected.

Additionally, opportunities for international professional exchanges and continuous learning are limited, hindering the dissemination of the latest research and treatment approaches. This knowledge gap can lead to misdiagnosis or inadequate treatment for adult ADHD patients.

7. Need for holistic support for adult ADHDers

While Hong Kong offers a range of support services for individuals with disabilities, these services often don't fully consider the unique needs of adult ADHD patients. The challenges faced by adult ADHD patients can differ from those of other disabled individuals, necessitating specialised support and assistance.

Specialized support services tailored specifically for adult ADHD patients are relatively scarce in Hong Kong. This includes medical and therapeutic (counselling) support as well as assistance in daily living, workplace dynamics, and social interactions.

8. Untapped Potential of ADHD Patients in the Workforce

Misconceptions and stereotypes about ADHD persist in society, with a the prevalent misconception that associates ADHD with Low intelligence. However, many ADHD patients have IQs within the normal range, with some even significantly above average. These individuals often excel academically and possess valuable professional skills. Yet, due to inadequate treatment and support, they frequently encounter challenges in the workplace, such as struggling to find suitable jobs or facing constant threats of unemployment.⁷

In today's society, talent is a precious asset. Our failure to recognize and harness the potential of this population segment stemming from misconceptions and biases about ADHD represents not only an injustice to these individuals but also a significant loss for Hong Kong's community.

8 Key Recommendations

1. Strengthen the Medical Support System

- Queen Mary Hospital and other medical institutions should offer more detailed and transparent ADHD-related information on their official websites.
- Drawing from practices in the U.S. and Canada, expedite the process of allowing more trained general practitioners to assist in treating ADHD patients, reducing wait times and treatment costs.
- Reduce waiting times in the public healthcare system to ensure patients receive timely and appropriate treatment and support.
- Increase the availability of free or low-cost ADHD screening events.

2. Raising ADHD Awareness in Hong Kong and Reduce Undiagnosed Cases

- Intensify public awareness campaigns through schools, workplaces, and media outlets, encouraging patients and their families to proactively seek medical assistance proactively.
- Organize an annual ADHD Awareness Week to boost public and industry understanding.
- Adopt the model of the "Shall We Talk" initiative, enhancing long-term public understanding and awareness of ADHD through education, research, training, and collaborative activities.

3. Boost ADHD Resources and Professional Training in Hong Kong

- Increase the number of treatment and counselling centres specifically for adult ADHD.
- Establish a more efficient referral system, enabling general practitioners and other medical experts to refer patients to specialized ADHD clinics or departments easily.
- Collaborate with the Adult ADHD Department of the National University of Singapore to introduce objective ADHD diagnostic techniques and share treatment experiences.
- Expand adult ADHD courses and training in medical schools and psychology departments.
- Encourage doctors and relevant experts to attend international seminars to stay updated on the latest research and treatment methods.
- Introduce professional roles and qualifications for ADHD coaching.

4. Raise Awareness of Rights for ADHD Patients in Hong Kong

- Organize workshops and lectures to educate patients and their families about their legal rights.
- Create a dedicated website or information platform offering relevant legal and policy information.

5. Bridge the Support Service Gap for Adult ADHD in Hong Kong

- Establish support groups and networks tailored specifically for adult ADHD patients.
- Offer professional vocational counselling and training to help patients better integrate into the workforce.
- The government should provide financial assistance or subsidies for families opting for private medical services but unable to afford them.

6. Maximize the Potential of ADHD Patients in Hong Kong's Talent Pool

- Collaborate with businesses to offer internships and job opportunities specially cater for ADHD patients.
- Encourage companies to provide a more accommodating work environment, such as flexible working hours and dedicated workspaces.

7. Establish Patient Support Organizations

- Drawing inspiration from ADHD units in Canada, the European Union, and the UK, there's a strong case for establishing support organizations or self-help groups for ADHD patients in Hong Kong.

8. Fund ADHD Research and Data Collection

- There's a need for more extensive research and data collection concerning adult ADHD. Beyond studies focused on children and families, research exploring the relationship between adult ADHD, emotions, and workplace dynamics is crucial.

Conclusion:

Hong Kong Let's Talk ADHD Association, a non-profit charitable organization dedicated to enhancing public awareness of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), highlights multiple challenges Hong Kong faces regarding adult ADHD.

These issues demand urgent attention, from the significant number of undiagnosed cases, misguided societal understanding to the lack of medical support and limited awareness of patient rights. In response, the Association has put forth eight key recommendations, including intensifying public awareness campaigns, enhancing professional training, and funding pertinent research. The overarching goal is to offer comprehensive support to ADHD patients, ensuring they receive equal opportunities and respect in society and fully harness their potential talents and capabilities.

Hong Kong Let's Talk ADHD Association

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