



Mr Chui at a press conference  
(Photo courtesy of Mr Chui)

## Visionary in the field of pharmacy: an interview with Mr William Chun-ming Chui

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As President of the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Hong Kong (SHPHK) since 2012, Mr William Chun-ming Chui has actively promoted drug and health education both in print and in media, hoping to empower the public participating in the decision making process for health management together with healthcare professionals. Mr Chui is also a passionate advocate for pharmacists and has called for reform of these underutilised healthcare professionals to alleviate the overstretched public healthcare system in Hong Kong.

### Serving with motivation and vision

Throughout the years, Mr Chui's efforts have mostly revolved around a common theme: patient empowerment through acquisition of drug knowledge. "Knowledge is power", he said. After all, patients must understand their treatment options if they are to participate in the decision making process of their care. Meanwhile, patient education on the indication, efficacy, and safety side-effect profile of drugs may facilitate drug adherence. For instance, when patients are well informed that some antihypertensives cause postural hypotension, they could better anticipate it and learn to cope, such as by taking their drugs just before sleep at the initial stage of the new drug treatment. Pharmacist could counsel patients on side-effect management and solve patients' drug-related problems in order to achieve optimal therapeutic outcomes.

In addition to patient empowerment, Mr Chui has a vision to redefine the roles that pharmacists can

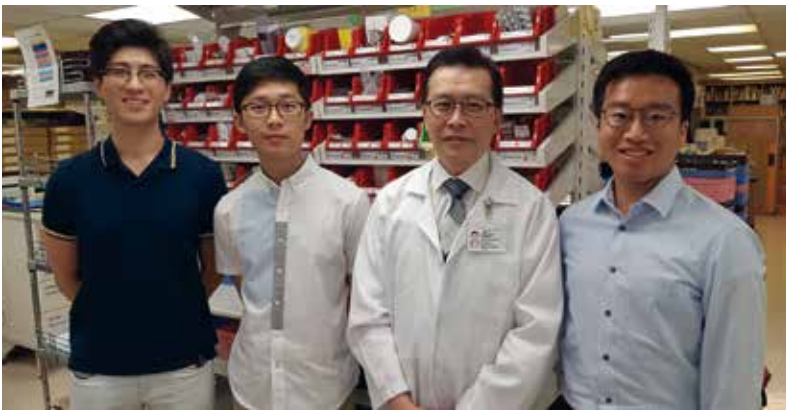
play. After graduating from the United Kingdom, Mr Chui returned to Hong Kong and found that the local pharmacists were heavily underutilised. Whereas pharmacists working in the United Kingdom are multifunctional, those working in Hong Kong are often limited to drug dispensing duties. Yet, it is his firm belief that pharmacists in Hong Kong can and should play a bigger role in the healthcare system. "Patients always ask about drug treatment", said Mr Chui. As experts in medicines and their usage, pharmacists are more than capable of dealing with drug-related issues and enquiries. Doctors could then focus on taking care of the big picture. "Nurses are the doctor's right hand, and pharmacists are the left hand," he added. Mr Chui always motivates hospital pharmacists to use their clinical skill and knowledge to assist doctors for improving the safety and quality of care for patients.

### Working as a clinical pharmacist with sense of mission

In addition to his passion for patient-centred care, Mr Chui actively promotes the expertise of hospital pharmacists. He was instrumental in introducing the Clinical Pharmacist Service at Queen Mary Hospital in 1994, which was the first such service to be introduced in the Hospital Authority. Clinical pharmacists have grown to become indispensable players in the healthcare team. Their duties include formulation of drug treatment strategy; medication review and drug counselling for patients; and consultations on drug-related issues such as dosage



Mr Chui at a community lecture on influenza vaccination, co-organised by SHPHK for kindergarten principals and teachers (Photo courtesy of Mr Chui)



Mr Chui (second from right) with student journalists (from left: William, Gordon and Justin) at Queen Mary Hospital



Mr Chui (top right) and his pharmacist team. Mr Chui has his mask off to reflect where people can safely take off their masks: at home (Photo courtesy of Mr Chui)

and drug-drug interactions; and review of new drug treatments. This clinical service was widely acclaimed and was then expanded to other regional hospitals in 1996. Currently, Queen Mary Hospital is conducting another pilot scheme in allowing clinical pharmacists to prepare discharge prescriptions in three medical wards, hoping to alleviate the workload of doctors especially junior doctors, and to speed up the discharge of patients.

Mr Chui has also spent his time implementing initiatives for promoting better drug management and patient choice. One of these initiatives was the Queen Mary Hospital Drug Formulary that, when it was introduced in 1991, was the first drug formulary in the Hospital Authority. Recently, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr Chui and his pharmacist team published the *Interim Drug Treatment Handbook for COVID-19*. This book, available in electronic and print formats, reviews the latest literature on potential drug treatments for the virus, hoping to provide an updated and comprehensive reference for use when treating infected patients. The team also prepared a COVID-19 fact sheet in both Chinese and English for the public, including a list of the known routes of transmission and prevention measures, providing the public with more information to safeguard their own health. Despite the laborious task of keeping these publications up-to-date, Mr Chui stated that it would be a waste to keep all the knowledge to ourselves without disseminating it to his colleagues, other healthcare professionals, and more importantly the general public.

## Bringing pharmaceutical knowledge to the public

In addition to pioneering change within the system, Mr Chui has spearheaded the role of pharmacists in empowering the public through drug education. The public may be most familiar with his frequent appearances in the media. As President of the SHPHK, he has been the spokesperson for pharmacists regarding issues ranging from medication incidents to the logistics of COVID-19 vaccine distribution.

Mass media is key for disseminating pharmaceutical information, advocacy, and influencing policy making of the government. However, as Mr Chui notes, exploiting the media successfully to achieve these requires healthcare professionals to demonstrate media savvy. He reminds us that the goal is to understand the audience and pre-emptively answer their questions, not to demonstrate how much one knows. Increasing public awareness requires concisely summarising the relevant facts, explaining issues in layman's terms, and providing possible solutions after incidents occurred.

Not everyone may have noticed, but Mr Chui ensures that he always appears together with a medical doctor during press conferences. As a pharmacist, he shares his expertise in drug treatment, while leaving the discussion of symptoms and diagnosis to the doctor. This is an intentional choice, meant to highlight how pharmacists are not meant to replace doctors, but rather to play a key partnership role in patient care.

Mr Chui reveals that his proudest achievement was the establishment of the Drug Education Resource Centre (DERC) in 2002, a non-profit organisation under the SHPHK, which provides free drug information and education to patients and the general public. In line with the SHPHK's mission of promoting the advancement and improvement of hospital pharmacy services, the DERC advocates for drug education and shared decision making by doctors and patients when choosing treatments. In addition to publishing a plain language guide to common diseases and pharmacological treatment, the DERC website also provides access to drug related articles and videos, such as demonstrations by pharmacists on the proper use of inhalers for patients with asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Mr Chui stresses that medical information should be written by professional healthcare

workers or medical writers, rather than non-professionals. Credibility is especially crucial in the modern era, where we are constantly bombarded with information, and so the content that the DERC publishes is all directly produced by pharmacist volunteers. Moreover, the DERC often partners with patient support groups in order to assess the actual needs of patients and to obtain feedback from them.

## Parting words

Mr Chui's vision has remained resolute throughout his years of service. It has been his wish to inspire junior or trainee pharmacists to recognise how their profession could contribute to the bigger picture. Mr Chui was honoured to have the support of his team of young pharmacists. "Don't do it for self-interest," he says, "we do it for the public and the profession through teamwork." He reminds us of the impact pharmacists can have with a tale of an 80-year-old patient taking multiple drugs who burst into tears at the Pharmaceutical Care Clinic after being reassured, "Your symptoms were actually common adverse effects of the drug treatment rather than the deterioration of your disease condition. You have tried your best." The motto of the DERC is very touching: "Drugs cure diseases; hearts cure patients 用藥醫病 用心醫人".