



## To see is to have a future: an interview with Dr Jason Cheuk-sing Yam

Dr Yam examining a local child's eyes in Sichuan Province

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In 2015, Dr Jason Cheuk-sing Yam launched the Hong Kong Children Eye Care Programme. Currently in its third phase, and now known as CUHK Jockey Club Myopia Prevention Programme, it has served tens of thousands of disadvantaged children since its inception. For this remarkable initiative, he received the Ten Outstanding Young Persons Award in 2019 and the Hong Kong Humanity Award in 2021.

After training in Tung Wah Eastern Hospital, Dr Yam joined the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) in 2013 to pursue his interests in research and education. As an associate professor, Dr Yam led the team who conducted the 2019 LAMP-1 study and 2023 LAMP-2 Study, which were the world's first randomised placebo-controlled trials of low-dose atropine in children to prevent myopia progression as well as its onset respectively. He is also an international leader in ophthalmology, having served since 2017 as Secretary General of the Asia-Pacific Strabismus and Paediatric Ophthalmology Society.

Determined to act on preventable childhood

eye problems, Dr Yam initiated the programme for underprivileged families, which was the first of its kind in Hong Kong. "It is a child's right to see," he declared during our interview. Looking back to when it all started, Dr Yam is truly grateful for the support he received that allowed him to overcome various difficulties. "Clinics of the CUHK Eye Centre in the Hong Kong Eye Hospital weren't open on the weekends prior to this programme, while conducting comprehensive eye examinations in primary schools was limited by the lack of equipment," he recalled. After over a year of preparation, the programme was finally launched on 7 March 2015, and provided treatment to over 100 children and their families on its first weekend at CUHK Eye Centre.

Volunteers from all walks of life play an integral role in the programme—it now relies on the support of more than 100 ophthalmologists, 500 medical students, 200 nursing students, 3000 secondary school students, and 1000 volunteers from various uniformed services. "I'm deeply grateful to all ambassador doctors and volunteers who share our vision and lend us their unconditional support,"

Dr Yam said. Today, the programme not only provides comprehensive eye examinations for children, but also acts as a platform where volunteers can support each other while serving the community.

Dr Yam and his team continue to advance their mission to improve the early detection and treatment

of children's eye conditions. To date, the programme has provided care to more than 40000 children, including both standard assessments, such as testing for visual acuity and strabismus, and more advanced diagnostics, using techniques like optical coherence tomography to detect retinal disorders. Since 2018, generous support from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust has allowed the programme to increase in its scope by offering additional services. Under the programme, participants are eligible for a subsidy to cover the cost of spectacles if needed. Outside the hospital, the team has also organised home visits to reach children with special educational needs or intellectual disabilities, which has allowed them to provide basic eye care services and advice on improving eyesight through environmental modifications. At the community level, around 400 health talks were given to parents, teachers, and social workers, and several health exhibitions were also organised in the hopes of raising public awareness and knowledge of children's eye disorders. In the words of Dr Yam, "Children have unlimited potential—it is not fair for disadvantaged families' lives to be affected by visual impairment due to poor access to healthcare."

Despite having to sacrifice his weekends to run the programme, Dr Yam finds the experience personally rewarding. Over the years, he has witnessed the growth of his volunteers, watching secondary school students become medical students and medical students become ophthalmologists. During our interview, Dr Yam recounted a heart-



(From left) Dr Yam and the reporters, Justin and William



Dr Yam and other guests at the CUHK Jockey Club Children Eye Care Programme (second phase) promotional event

warming interaction at a restaurant during a meal to celebrate his child's fifth birthday: "A glass of orange juice was unexpectedly offered to my child," he smiled, "I later discovered that it was a gift from a waiter whose child had benefited from the programme." For him, this was a touching reminder of the positive impact that the programme has had on the community.

In addition to his local efforts, Dr Yam also has experience in overseas community service. For instance, Meigu County in Sichuan Province is one of several places where Dr Yam and others have contributed to start the local cataract services, as high exposure to ultraviolet light here puts residents at increased risk. This is further compounded by the challenging terrain and high average age of the population, many of whom have limited mobility, which reduces their access to local eye care services. During his time there, Dr Yam helped to train local ophthalmologists to ensure the sustainability of the programme. "One of the most rewarding moments in ophthalmology is, in fact, performing cataract surgeries," Dr Yam said. "You can clearly witness the

joy on patients' faces when they realise they can see clearly again after removing the gauze."

Drawing on his faith, Dr Yam has always believed in the importance of gratefulness and humility. "Nothing should be taken for granted," he said. "I would like to thank our faculty, my department, and my mentors, Prof Calvin Pang and Prof Clement Tham, for their encouragement and guidance. I would like to thank my team, too—in particular, Prof Guy Chen, Dr Ka-wai Kam, Dr Xiujuan Zhang, and Ms Mandy Ng—as well as all the partners and volunteers."

When asked what advice he would give to young doctors wishing to follow in his footsteps, Dr Yam reminded us that collaboration is essential for projects like the programme, remarking that one needs to be considerate, resilient, and able to think from the perspectives of others. Teamwork is essential, as one would not be able to achieve anything if unable to work well with others. In the words of Dr Yam, "Follow your heart and passion. Be true to yourself, and be committed even when success is uncertain."