



Dear Fellows and Trainees,

We have often spoken of ‘disruptions in medicine’ in recent years. Without a doubt, the way we practice medicine, and our lives, have been severely disrupted in the last few months. It has been three months to the day that COVID-19 was first reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) China Office. Since then, our lives have been locked in combats with this previously unknown infection. Many of us have been working non-stop since the Lunar New Year, when the Government raised its health alert level to the highest level of emergency response. The situation worsened when the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic on 12th March 2020. Since then, the number of confirmed cases in Hong Kong, many of which imported, has climbed at an alarming rate overwhelming the workload and other resources of the local healthcare system. At the time of writing, we hear public hospitals are running out of isolation beds/capacities.

To all fellows and trainees of the Academy, I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude for your professionalism and dedication in serving the public in this unprecedented time. Everyone, irrespective of their discipline, is doing their utmost to contain the disease, thus safeguarding the health of the people of Hong Kong. Your efforts have not gone unnoticed as Hong Kong is often praised by people around the world for its efforts to successfully control the COVID-19 epidemic.

To trainees, it is unfortunate that your training has been severely disrupted but I truly believe that what is happening now is indeed the best form of training that will hone your skills as a competent medical specialist and a humanistic person in the years to come. The Academy will continue to support you. Regarding training perspectives, we have been discussing and agreed with all 15 constituent Colleges to exercise flexibility and make necessary adjustments to the training, assessment and examination arrangements. We have also discussed with the Hospital Authority which assured that flexibility on recognition of training qualifications would be exercised to minimize the possible impacts of postponement of examination or fellowship conferment. The most important principle, however, is that standards must be maintained and will not be jeopardized so that people will remember the ‘Class of 2020’ is a special group of clinical specialist fellows.

Despite the COVID-19 disruption, the Academy Secretariat has been maintaining daily operations. Meetings, training activities and examinations have continued in our building, with necessary precautionary measures in place. In particular, meetings of the Council and the Education Committee have continued so that our key businesses are not disrupted. We have also continued our efforts to facilitate continuing medical education for our colleagues. In fact, a seminar on “Advance Directives” was held on the weekend of 21 March, with a total of over 200 participants who attended either physically or via the web-based platform. Sadly, however, our flagship annual Medical Education Conference which has been scheduled to take place in May will now have to give way to the pandemic.

The COVID-19 disruption has not all been negative. It serves the Colleges and the Academy as a good reminder to review the content of the various curricula offered by the Academy, and the way training is delivered and competency assessed. The use of information technology to aid training and continuing medical education is actively pursued. The outbreak has also reminded us of the importance of training and capacity building associated with the handling of communicable diseases from different perspectives, including prevention, treatment, clinical ethics, social responsibilities and more. Such will not be restrictive to individual disciplines such as community medicine or infectious diseases but across all our different specialty Colleges.

We have yet to know when the COVID-19 pandemic will recede but we shall continue to monitor the situation and keep you posted on any updates from the Academy. Despite these difficult times that we are facing now, I have no doubt in my mind that we shall overcome this crisis. The current situation is not only a test of resilience of the medical and healthcare professionals in Hong Kong but also our city and the whole of the international community. It is also a great reminder of humanism, self-reflection, love and kindness for each other and respect for nature and everything that is around us. Together the battle will be won!

Yours sincerely,
Professor CS Lau
President
Hong Kong Academy of Medicine
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