



HONG KONG PHYSIOTHERAPY ASSOCIATION LIMITED

香港物理治療學會有限公司

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7 September 2022

To Panel on Health Services:

Re: Comments on implementation of direct access to physiotherapy service in Hong Kong (agenda item for meeting of the Panel on Health Services on 9 September 2022)

On behalf of the Hong Kong Physiotherapy Association, I would like to express my strong support to the amendment of the legislation to allow citizens of Hong Kong to receive physiotherapy service without referral from registered medical practitioners.

Since Australia became the first country to implement direct access in 1976, more and more countries have followed the same practice because of the many benefits that direct access can bring about (e.g. timely physiotherapy treatment to patients, improved patient health outcomes, reduced strain on hospital system and healthcare cost, etc.). Today, more than 80 countries/territories have adopted various forms of direct access. Even in developing countries in Asia, such as Thailand and Indonesia, direct access has been implemented since 2004 and 2013 respectively. **Hong Kong, as a metropolitan city where high-quality healthcare services are provided, should benchmark with international practice and allow the public to receive direct physiotherapy service.**

Allowing the public to have direct access to physiotherapy service is completely aligned with the Government's initiative to strengthen primary healthcare. It improves patient access to physiotherapy services, and reduce the pressure on the public health system. By addressing the health problems in a timely manner through direct physiotherapy service, the risk of the health conditions becoming chronic and needing hospitalization can be minimized.

The principle of patient autonomy is of paramount importance in modern day healthcare practice. The implementation of direct access offers the patients an option to consult a physiotherapist and receive timely physiotherapy intervention. It is the right of a patient to seek physiotherapy services directly without a medical referral. Citizens of Hong Kong have the right to consult a medical doctor, Chinese medicine practitioner or chiropractor for their health problems. There is no reason why they should not also have the right to choose physiotherapists. Implementation of direct access does not negate the fact that the patients can still choose to consult a doctor first and obtain a referral for physiotherapy. It simply provides the patients with an alternative.

In terms of patient safety, strong research evidence from overseas experience shows no increase in adverse events, malpractice or litigation cases. Physiotherapy education has more than 60 years of history in Hong Kong and meets the international standard. Our graduates are well trained to identify patient conditions that are beyond the scope of physiotherapy practice. Screening for health warning signs is a routine procedure performed by physiotherapists. The notion that having physiotherapists as

first contract practitioners poses danger to patients because of missed serious health conditions (e.g., cancer) is NOT supported by any scientific evidence.

Overall, allowing the public to have direct access to physiotherapy service has many benefits that far outweigh the potential risks. Amendment of the legislation to pave way for direct access to physiotherapy is urgently required to benefit the patients in need.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Marco Pang', written in a cursive style.

Prof. Marco Pang
President, Hong Kong Physiotherapy Association