

Adolescent Health – A Neglected Domain in Global Child Health

Dr. Chok-wan CHAN

Board Chairman of the Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation

Honorary President of the Asia-Pacific Paediatric Association (APPA)

President of the International Paediatric Association (2007 to 2010)

It is estimated that there are around 1.8 billion adolescents worldwide nowadays. This is the largest generation of adolescents and young people in human history. In May 2016, the third report of Lancet Series on Adolescent Health themed “*Our Future: A Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health and Wellbeing*” published has highlighted the updated health data on adolescents and the appropriate approach in addressing the health challenges faced by this significant group of world population. Adolescence is a life phase in which the opportunities for health are great and future patterns of adult health are established. The changing patterns of adolescents’ health have the potential to undermine future population health as well as global economic development unless timely and effective strategies can be implemented. On the World Population Day in July 2014, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had made the following statement – “*I call on all with influence to prioritize youth in development plans, strengthen partnerships with youth-led organizations, and involve young people in all decisions that affect them. By empowering today’s youth, we will lay the groundwork for a more sustainable future for generations to come.*” Investment in children and youth at present stage will bring along more cost-effective returns to the entire population in future. This is why a focus on adolescence is crucial to the success of many public health agendas, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDG). Hong Kong, in 2017, regrettably is still facing the same problems such as youth suicides and other adolescent problems. While the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, as usual, plays a lot of lip-services on these issues and proposes a long list of completely useless procedures to deal with the conditions which are totally ***routine, bureaucratic and ineffective***. It is high time that all the healthcare professionals should work together to find out root-cause problems and try to eradicate the underlying causes and not just to hide the rubbish underneath the carpet. Problems for all these are mainly due to total failure of our education system (focusing too much on scholastic performance), lack of time to play, lack of moral education, failure of our younger population to grasp the core values for existence (life education), parenting problems, too much materialistic life styles, lack of positive life attitude, poor resilient ability and others. Detrimental results are reflected in the significant number of non-engaged adolescents in the community and the recent upheavals of physical/social violence in Hong Kong including the umbrella revolution (in Central) and the street riot (in Mongkok). It is highly lamentable to witness these behaviours in our masters for tomorrow.

In order to tackle the problem effectively and efficiently, the Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation and the Hong Kong Paediatric Society invited world expert Dr. Charles E. Irwin, Jr. from the United States to host a series of professional activities on the subject in Hong Kong and in Macau featuring “Adolescent Health Update from the Clinical, Research, Training, Policy and Advocacy perspectives” as well as a survey on adolescent health at the secondary schools aiming to advise the Government, the professionals and the public as to plan strategic action plans to solve the problems in Hong Kong.