



Health reform to focus on prevention

Healthy people don't need a doctor - sick people do, is a saying that the government would like healthy people to forget as it prepares to announce a reform of primary health-care services.

Instead of seeing a doctor just for ailments like flu and fever, health chiefs want people to go to clinics regularly for blood pressure and other checks, according to new guidelines on primary care.

Hongkongers should take responsibility for their own health. Prevention is better than treatment, said Professor Sian Griffiths, director of Chinese University's school of public health and chairwoman of a panel drawing up guidelines for patients and doctors on the ideal form of primary care. The government is urging people to pay more attention to preventive medicine, which means drinking and smoking less, more exercise and regular check-ups.

All Hongkongers, healthy or sick, can obtain a health passport from the Department of Health to jot down their clinical records. Diabetes and blood-pressure patients are asked to note their blood-sugar and blood-pressure levels, while healthy people are asked to set annual health goals, such as eating less oily food.

In another set of guidelines, Griffiths and panel members say disease prevention should start when a baby is still in the womb. Pregnant women are recommended to have a balanced diet and monitor regularly for gestational diabetes. Upon birth, babies should be breastfed and have adequate sleep. Children should avoid eating too many sugary snacks. They should also play physical games instead of computer games.

To prevent hypertension, people should have their blood pressure tested every two years and monitor their body-mass index for warning signs of obesity. Those aged 45 or above are also urged to have their blood-sugar level tested to identify diabetes early.

Griffiths said family doctors should also change their attitude, as primary care was getting more emphasis. As general practitioners were not required to undergo continuing medical education, many older doctors did not know about the latest treatment options, she said. The guidelines will inform them about the current first-line drugs in use, and will be updated yearly.

The department will hold six lectures in the coming months to promote the guidelines to doctors.

Dr Jeff Lee Pui-man, a senior medical officer of the department's primary care office, said previous lectures were well received and were attended by more than 100 doctors each time.

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