

Promoting a ‘Healthy City’ for Elderly People in Tseung Kwan O

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Introduction

Tseung Kwan O (TKO) is designated as one of the few strategic growth areas in Hong Kong SAR. Around 300,000 people have now moved into this district. The population is projected to be 520,000 upon full development. Of the 300,000 people residing in TKO, 9.9% are 60 years and over, making TKO the fourth youngest district in Hong Kong.

Like other developing new towns in Hong Kong, TKO faces common urbanization problems such as insufficient local employment opportunities and the consequent need to travel to work sites outside the district, time lag in provision of various services and facilities, nuclear families detached from support network, etc. All these, adding up, constitute threats detrimental to the health of people residing in TKO. Thus, whilst the Government was actively building the hard infrastructure of TKO, Haven of Hope Christian Service, with her 30 different service units started the ‘TKO - Healthy City’ project in 1998 to work on the soft aspects of the budding district. Today, the ‘TKO - Healthy City’ project is adopted by the Steering Committee of the project and is recognized as a regular committee under the Home Affairs Department.

This paper aims to present the experience of Haven of Hope Christian Service and the Steering Committee in promoting ‘Healthy City’ for elderly people in the local district. The premise is that in promoting ‘Healthy City’, healthy aging is promoted.

Definition of Health

‘Health’ was once defined as ‘the absence of illness or infirmity’. The progressive definition of health adopted by the World Health Organisation (WHO) is ‘a state of physical, social and psychological well-being, having harmonious family and inter-personal relationships, and a stable social support network, besides being able to enjoy life and attain one’s fullest potential’.

With such a definition, there are implications. The determinants of good health are not just good personal health habits, but inter-relatedness to wider issues is implied. Everyone and everything is inter-dependent for good health. The physical, economic and social environments have their direct and inter-related impacts on personal health. HEALTH IS NOT JUST THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE HEALTH CARE SECTOR. For all of us who have experience in services for our elderly people, we know for sure that this is so true.

Healthy Cities Project

The Healthy Cities Project was first promoted by the European Office of the World Health Organisation in 1985 and since has been adopted by WHO world-wide to work toward 'Health For All'. There are now more than 1,200 cities participating in this movement. Our Seven principles have been laid down to guide the implementation of 'Healthy Cities'. The principles include :

1. **Inter-sectoral collaboration** : Working partnership relationships are promoted and cultivated amongst local government and non-government service providers and organizations. This is to facilitate a concerted approach in meeting the total needs of the community.
2. **Community participation** : People are well aware of their needs and hence should be encouraged to voice out their opinions and empowered to take part in all activities affecting their health.
3. **Equity in health** : It is considered that every individual should have a fair opportunity to attain their full health potential.
4. **Health promotion** : Every individual has a role to play for the maintenance of his or her own health, and resources and information should be available for the individual to make healthy choices. Health promotive physical, economic and social environments should be created and healthy lifestyles encouraged.
5. **Primary health care** : The emphasis is on prevention and early detection of diseases to reduce the need for tertiary care.
6. **Evidence-based approach** : This is to ensure that real demands are identified and met by validated measures which are followed by proper evaluation procedures.
7. **International cooperation** : The sharing of knowledge and experiences with Healthy Cities around the world encourages mutual learning and improvements.

From the list of principles above, it can be seen that implementation of 'Healthy Cities' requires local solutions. Amongst 'Healthy Cities' Projects, there is the oft quoted line - 'Local Problems, Local Solutions' .

‘TKO - Healthy City’ Project

A ‘Healthy City’ Project was initiated by Haven of Hope Christian Service in September 1998. The Project received strong support from various Government bureaux and departments, the local community and the then Sai Kung Provisional District Board. A Steering Committee was formed in May 1999 to seek out the strategic plans for implementation to make TKO the first ‘Healthy City’ in Hong Kong. The meetings of the Steering Committee are now recognized under the Home Affairs Department, and ‘TKO - Healthy City’ is registered in the WHO - West Pacific Office as participating in the WHO ‘Healthy Cities’ movement.

The members of the Steering Committee include the Chairman of the Sai Kung District Council, who chairs the Steering Committee; Chairmen of the different committees of the Council; Chairmen of Area Committees; Chairman of the Sai Kung School Headmasters Association; Chairman of the TKO Pastoral Workers Association; Regional Senior Government Officials of the Departments of Health, Social Welfare, Housing, Education, Home Affairs, and Food & Environmental Hygiene; Chief Executives of the two local hospitals, the TKO Hospital and the Haven of Hope Hospital; and representatives of Haven of Hope Christian Service and other non-governmental organizations.

In the last two years, ‘TKO - Healthy City’ has launched several initiatives based on the implementation principles of ‘Healthy Cities’. These initiatives are targeted at different levels of the local community - at specific population groups, at different settings and at policies. These initiatives include the New Women’s Health - for the adult female population; Healthy Schools for primary school children at school sites; and Healthy Hospital for workers at a hospital worksite; and anti-smoking campaign, etc. A community diagnosis was conducted at the end of 2000. Results have been published in a report. A ‘Healthy City’ plan will be drawn up after consultation with various community groups on the results in the report.

‘TKO - Healthy City’ and the Elderly Population

The issues and concerns of our senior citizens and of ‘healthy aging’ are centred around a quality of life that encompasses physical, social and psychological well-being, harmonious relationships, stable social support networks, ability to enjoy life and attainment of their full potential. These are the very concerns of ‘Healthy Cities’. The seven principles of ‘Healthy City’ implementation are thus used to provide a framework to highlight the experience of Haven of Hope Christian Service and the Steering Committee in promoting a ‘healthy city’ for elderly people in TKO. It will be noted that in some areas, TKO is making advances in creating an environment for healthy aging while in some areas more attention is due.

Inter-sectoral participation : To promote inter-sectoral participation, we start with ourselves. Haven of Hope Christian Service has been actively undertaking internal integration by the sharing of expertise and pooling of resources amongst its various elderly service units. The service units of Haven of Hope involved in elderly service include :

Haven of Hope Hospital, Medical & Geriatric Rehabilitation Centre, Community Geriatric Assessment Service, Community Nursing Service, Infirmary, Nursing Home, Care & Attention Home, Day Care Centre for the Elderly, Dementia Day Care Centre, Home Care & Support Centre, Enhanced Home & Community Care Service, Social Centres for the Elderly, Elderly Protection Service, Family Life Education Service, Community Health Development Centres, and a network of six general medical and dental clinics with medical specialty services.

The above service units operate in different sectors, serving elderly people of different economic backgrounds and of different degrees of frailty. Within the resources available, service units collaborate according to needs identified. The essence is to adopt a need-driven approach for the delivery of services rather than being limited by administrative boundaries imposed by the Government.

We then reached out our collaborative effort. A collaborative channel is now established between TKO Hospital and Haven of Hope Clinics. Patients of the Clinics who have been admitted to the Hospital could be discharged back to the Clinics for follow-up care.

Recently, under the auspices of the ‘TKO - Healthy City’ Steering Committee, the Geriatric Services Liaison Committee was set up to formally recognize the partnering and collaborative efforts among the providers/operators of elderly services and to encourage inter-sectoral participation. Members of the Liaison Committee include representatives of NGOs of all elderly services in Sai Kung District; representatives from Tseung Kwan O Hospital, Haven of Hope Hospital and Department of Health, representative from Leisure & Cultural Services Department; Social Welfare Department’s Rehabilitation and Elderly Service Officer; and District Council Members. The Liaison Committee aims to identify the common needs of the elderly people in the different service units so that collaborative programmes can be implemented through shared resources such as exercise promotion and falls prevention.

Community participation : The elderly people are well aware of their needs and they should be given opportunities to participate in the planning process regarding how their needs are to be fulfilled. Through participation, elderly can assume better responsibility over their health. In the ‘TKO - Healthy City’ Plan there should be efforts made to enable the elderly people to participate in the planning process.

Health promotion : Through inter-sectoral collaboration among the various service units of Haven of Hope Christian Service and local organizations, several programmes have been conducted to assist the elderly in healthier lifestyles. These include proper diets and exercise programmes.

More work is required to create a health promotive environment for the elderly. We will work with the Sai Kung District Council to develop a walking trail to facilitate exercise through walking. There is a lack of internal transportation lines making it difficult for our elderly people to have easy access to the various services located in the different housing estates. The monotone high-rise public housing estates are not conducive to friendly socializing for formation of supportive networks.

As one way to circumvent the above difficulties, Haven of Hope is collaborating with Hong Kong Housing Society to develop the Senior Citizen Residences. In this innovative development for elderly people of middle means, residential units and health promotive services are housed under one roof so that ‘continuum of care’ can be provided and ‘aging in place’ can be realised. Elderly residents in SEN Residences can have easy access to a wide array of recreational, leisure, social, health and care services and programmes without the need to source out and travel to obtain services.

Primary health care : Several programmes on prevention and early detection of diseases have been carried out for elderly people. These included osteoporosis screening and eye care. Health maintenance programmes are available at Haven of Hope’s network of clinics, besides those available at the local Department of Health Elderly Health Centre. A special discount scheme is provided to increase accessibility of the elderly people to primary health care. Through the Geriatric Services Liaison Committee more programmes will be planned for the elderly. Generally, the programmes are conducted in non-medical settings, such as Social Centres for the Elderly, and are bundled with health promotion elements related to healthy lifestyles. For example, the screening for osteoporosis project would include programmes on developing healthy eating habits for strong bones.

Evidence-based Approach : The Community Diagnosis conducted at the end of 2000 to assess needs of the district is a first step towards evidence-based approach. With the results and community consultation, the District Health Plan could be formulated, programmes conducted and outcomes monitored. Evaluation of the plans and programmes would ensure that efforts are soundly based. ‘TKO - Healthy City’ will collaborate with academic bodies to carry out relevant research studies.

International Cooperation : Sharing in the planning and implementation of ‘TKO - Healthy City’ with other Healthy Cities of the world are being done via the internet, visits and international conferences to promote international cooperation and bridging of experiences. Indeed, TKO is a microcosm of the international city of Hong Kong and cities are only houses in this global village.

Conclusion

Concluding, the experience of Haven of Hope Christian Service and the Steering Committee of the ‘TKO -Healthy City’ project shows that promotion of healthy aging can be achieved through promoting a ‘Healthy City’ for elderly people. The implementation principles of Healthy Cities are generic and are applicable to promoting healthy aging. With the establishment of the Geriatric Services Liaison Committee, a targeted approach at the elderly population by the ‘TKO - Healthy City’ Steering Committee, a more focused and coordinated development of a healthy city for the senior citizens of TKO is envisaged. On a micro level, the innovative SEN Residences is one way to provide a health promotive environment for its residents to age healthily