



Dr. LEE Kam Cheong
President

c/o Department of Pathology, Princess Margaret Hospital, 2-10 Princess Margaret Hospital Road, Lai Chi Kok, Kowloon, Hong Kong
Tel.: (852) 2990 1804 Fax: (852) 2370 0969 E-mail: kclee@ha.org.hk

THE HONG KONG COLLEGE OF
PATHOLOGISTS
A Constituent College of the
Hong Kong Academy of Medicine

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President:
Dr. LEE Kam Cheong

To the Editor
South China Morning Post

Vice-Presidents:
Dr. NG Wing Fung
Dr. YUNG Wai Hung, Raymond

Dear Sir,

Registrar:
Dr. SUEN Wang Ming, Michael

We wish to thank Lilian Goh "Alarm at medical lab health checks" and your Editorial (25 April 2007) for drawing the attention of the public to the potential health hazards of directly promoting health-check packages to consumers by some medical laboratories.

Deputy Registrar
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Health care services such as diagnosis, treatment, and disease screening should be provided by qualified medical profession to safeguard the public. Laboratory testing with medical implications thus should be provided or supervised only by pathologists, medical doctors specialised in laboratory medicine. It is worrying to see medical laboratory testing being treated as a consumer product or a commercial activity rather than for health protection. The article unveiled the issue and the editorial rightly pointed out our concern. However, bypassing the family doctors and thus leading to unnecessary investigations and health hazards is only part of the problem, the more alarming part actually lies inside the medical laboratories.

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Laboratories are not performing equally. Without proper supervision by qualified professionals to ensure quality and standard, there is nothing to prevent misleading results out of poorly-calibrated equipment, inadequately-trained technicians, and even all sorts of profit-driven irregular practices. Unfortunately, unlike the medical laboratories in public hospitals and universities that are all directed by pathologists, many private medical laboratories in Hong Kong are not properly supervised, and the accuracy of the results from such laboratories is unknown.

As pathologists, we fully understand the "garbage-in, garbage-out" phenomenon in providing laboratory service - it is crucially important to have accurate results before they can be interpreted correctly. While the potential hazard of unregulated health check services bypassing the family doctors can be seen by many, more worryingly, however, the danger that lies even before the results left the laboratories would not be easily detected by the public. Unfortunately, as purely profit-driven business operations that are not supervised by medically qualified professionals, and hence not being bound

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by medical ethics, not only is the result reliability of these health-checks questionable, they are also open to corruptive practices if not properly regulated. We therefore submit that, in the best interests of the public, all medical laboratories, whether for diagnosis or for disease screening, must be adequately supervised to ensure a uniform and reliable standard.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely,

Dr KC Lee
President