

FOCUS

Keeping Up with Times, Taking the Organization to a New Height

Interview with Mrs Patricia Chu, BBS, Chairman of The Hong Kong Anti-Cancer Society

Mrs Patricia Chu, BBS, who had served as the Deputy Director of Social Welfare, Chairperson of Social Workers Registration Board, and Chairperson of The Equal Opportunities Commission, etc, has a wealth of experience in governing non-profit organizations. Although retired for 15 years, she has continued to be actively involved in governing various organizations, including The Hong Kong Anti-Cancer Society (HKACS), first as an Executive Committee (Ex Co) member since 2003, then the Chairman since 2012.



Mrs Chu (second right) actively participated in the HKACS's activities.

In the development of any organizations, there are always ups and downs. The HKACS is no exception in its 55 years of history. "I can still remember in my first year joining the Society, the Ex Co received notice from the Hospital Authority that the Nam Long Hospital would have to be closed by the end of that year. We were shocked as it meant the organization would lose its recurrent funding in a few months' time. In face of the crisis, the Ex Co invited a consultancy to conduct a feasibility study for the use of the premises. As a result, it was renovated to become the Hong Kong Jockey Club Cancer Rehabilitation Centre, with well designed facilities and patient-centered services. However, the negative image of the hospital being 'a place for dying' was so deeply rooted that its operations was very challenging in the initial years. In recent years, we strived to strengthen brand building, promoting the holistic services of the 'home away from home'. Although the HKACS is self-financed with no government subvention, we are grateful to have continuous support from charitable foundations and the public, allowing us to render high quality cancer care," said Mrs Chu.

With rising public expectations, the HKACS has been expanding its service. In 2013, the Ex Co started reviewing its governance structure. Mrs Chu firmly believed that the organization must catch up with societal demand. She said, "The stakeholders expect us to achieve our mission and provide quality services. We are pleased to have overwhelming support and a good reputation. I am particularly touched by the donations from estates given by past patients, giving us the impetus to charge forward in response to social needs."

Recently the Society has been focusing on improving its governance capacity. The Ex Co conducted an organizational review in 2015 to streamline its structure and clarify the line of accountability among the Ex Co, committees and staff. "The HKACS may not be big, but all the Ex Co members have committed their time, knowledge and network wholeheartedly to achieve our mission. We all agreed that there was a need for a clearer governance structure at that time for its advancement," she added. "Last year, we held a 'Strategic Planning Day' to revisit our vision, set out strategic goals and focus of work. We must not be complacent, and be better prepared to meet the ever changing needs in society in order to serve more patients," Mrs Chu opined.



Group photo of Mrs Chu (front row, third right) and guests at the Symposium on Cancer Challenge in Hong Kong.

Besides the HKACS, Mrs Chu is also the Founding Chairman of the Consortium of Institutes on Family in the Asian Region and the Asian Academy of Family Therapy. She shared that, "the Chair is an NGO's leader. He/she should believe in its mission, to make his/her best effort in promoting the organization's work. Integrity and fairness are also vital. Communication skill is essential to convey accurate messages and facilitate collaborative efforts for policy change. Lastly, the Chair needs to keep up with the latest service development." Founded for over half a century, Mrs Chu emphasized that the Society is facing very different needs today, and the NGO must keep moving forward in order to face crises and continue to thrive.

Video of Mrs Chu's sharing on the qualities to be a Chairperson. (Cantonese only): <https://governance.hkcss.org.hk/node/301>