

Gerontech and Innovation Expo cum Summit, 16-18 June 2017, Hong Kong

Hong Kong is lucky to be one of the places enjoying the longest life expectancy in the world. While longevity should be celebrated, it is also the defining challenge of our time. We need to make sure that the longer lives of our elderly are lived well and healthily. It is the healthy life expectancy, not just life expectancy, that we should aspire for. But our current system is already under strain in keeping up with the social service and health care needs of today's ageing population. As the pace of our demographic change continues to accelerate with the elderly proportion climbing from the existing 17% to 31% in the next 20 years, the demand will grow substantially. Changes are essential to manage the huge demand for care in the coming years. Much of the answer lies in innovation¹.

While we will always be fascinated by state-of-art technologies such as robotic health workers, not all innovation requires rocket science. Indeed, for most elderly who are ageing at home, what they need are relatively low tech solutions or even tech-free products with effective design to prevent falls or help them manage their declining hearing and visual ability as well as mobility. Care-givers or family members can also benefit from innovation as through mobile devices they can stay connected with the elderly and monitor their medication record or health situation such as blood pressure. Further, innovation can help professional care workers in institutionalised settings do their jobs easier, better and safer while improving the quality of care for the elderly.

In recent years, we are encouraged by the emergence of local innovation to improve the functioning of our elderly, slow their physical or cognitive decline, manage their chronic, non-communicable disease conditions, support their autonomy, facilitate their social inclusion, delay their institutionalisation and thus turn ageing in place into a reality. These accomplishments notwithstanding, much work remains to be done. We see the need for greater awareness and appreciation of the power of technology and innovation in changing the way we age amongst our elderly and their care-givers, policy makers, industry leaders and healthcare/social service professionals. We see the need for engaging the elderly in articulating their needs and preferences and facilitating discussion between the Government and other stakeholders on how best to match technology or enable innovation to meet elderly's needs in the light of overseas experience. We also see the need for fostering closer collaboration among various stakeholders in the innovation cycle to smoothen the process from the incubation of an idea to ultimately benefiting elderly users.

These are the motivations behind our organising the first GIES on 16-18 June 2017 at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre. It will be held as one of the celebratory activities of the 20th Anniversary of the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. GIES has two parts—the **Summit** will engage a wide spectrum of the international and

local community, including the public and private sectors, policy makers, academics and professionals, the young and the older generations, to share information, exchange views and lessons, and debate new ideas about the current and emerging health and social challenges for our ageing population, as well as about developing, adapting and empowering technology and innovation to meet these challenges; and the **Expo**, which is open to members of the public, will showcase local and global examples of technological and social innovation in areas including assistive and medical devices, wearable gadgets, sensor and monitoring systems, food, telehealth, smart home technology, robotics as well as delivery of our public healthcare services, home-based care and community-based support. Throughout the three-day event, we will also host a number of theme-based workshops to look at emerging issues confronting the use of innovation for the ageing population.

The objectives of GIES are to promote community awareness of the power of technology and innovation for healthy and active ageing; identify the driving forces and hurdles in encouraging innovation for the ageing population in Hong Kong; and prioritise the areas that are in most need of innovative solutions to cope with the ageing challenge. We look forward to receiving you and having fruitful exchanges at the GIES in June this year.

Reference

1. <http://gies2017.hkcss.org.hk>

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