

# MIND, BODY AND SOUL

*A HK\$10 million donation provides a shot in the arm for a Hong Kong health check campaign.*

*By Vicki Kwong.*



“The tests say I’m slightly overweight but otherwise healthy,” said Mrs Yip, beaming with satisfaction after her check-up. But the 50-year-old housewife had not paid a visit to her physician: she was one of hundreds of people who took part in the opening ceremony of “Better Health for a Better Hong Kong”, a campaign aimed at promoting a healthier lifestyle in the community.

In a city well known for its hustle and bustle, it is not surprising to find people complaining of their excessive workloads, unbalanced diet and lack of exercise. But few realise the long-term impact of such a lifestyle on their health.

It was with this in mind that “Better Health for a Better Hong Kong” was set up. Initiated by the Hospital Authority’s Health InfoWorld and made possible by a HK\$10 million (about US\$1.3 million) donation from the Li Ka-shing Foundation, the campaign seeks to bring about a sustainable improvement in the overall state of health in Hong Kong.

An opening ceremony at the Hospital Authority’s headquarters in Kowloon on a warm September morning marked the official launch of the five-year campaign. Mr Li Ka-shing, Chair-man of Hutchison Whampoa Limited and of the Li Ka-shing Foundation, was among the many guests who turned up to show their support.

“This project provides the general public with free health tests and free health education, so as to enhance their

awareness of a healthy lifestyle and promote the importance of preventive medicine,” Mr Li said.

Hospital Authority Chief Executive Dr William Ho expressed his gratitude for the Foundation’s generous contribution. “The Foundation has made this five-year project possible,” he said.

On this day, about 800 people from all walks of life were given free tests on their blood pressure, body-fat percentage, and cholesterol and blood-sugar levels. They also enjoyed a delicious meal made from fresh ingredients and prepared with the minimal amount of fats, salt and sugar. Although most of the participants agreed that it was impossible to change their habits overnight, many thought it was the right time for them to start.

Mrs Yip said although her test results were encouraging, she would try to exercise regularly. “There is so much to do within the household that I simply don’t have time,” she said, “but I’ll go hiking with my family as often as possible over the weekends.”

Miss Wong, who heard about



THE “BETTER HEALTH FOR A BETTER HONG KONG” CAMPAIGN PROVIDES FREE HEALTH TESTS TO “HIGH RISK” SECTORS OF THE WORKFORCE SUCH AS STREET VENDORS, CONSTRUCTION WORKERS AND TAXI DRIVERS, AND INCREASES AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE.

PHOTO: A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC GETS A FREE HEALTH CHECK.



“OUR STATE OF HEALTH CAN BE COMPARED TO A DAM. WHEN SMALL CRACKS APPEAR, IT WILL BE RELATIVELY EASY TO FIX. BUT IF WE DON’T DO ANYTHING, ONE DAY THE DAM MIGHT GIVE WAY ALTOGETHER”

the campaign through her company, said it was a great opportunity to learn how to improve her lifestyle. “I spend long hours in my office but never care to think about how damaging it can be to my health. Now I think it’s time I try to do something about it,” said the 42-year-old clerk.

After officiating at the opening, Mr Li underwent some basic tests that showed him to be in excellent health. While Mr Li is well known for his entrepreneurial talent, he is also proof that even the most ingenious businessman cannot succeed without physical vitality. “I maintain a healthy lifestyle despite my heavy workload. I enjoy exercising in the

morning, and do not smoke or drink. I prefer plain rice and vegetables to meat,” he said.

The Hospital Authority was optimistic that a significant number of people would benefit from the five-year campaign. “The enthusiasm shown by the participants today proves that the campaign has made a promising start,” Dr Ho said.

The project goes much further than one-off health tests. In the years up to 2004, 400,000 workers from targeted occupations are expected to benefit from this service. These people are classified among those in high health risk occupations and include taxi drivers, newspaper vendors,

PHOTO: MR LI KA-SHING, WHOSE LI-KA-SHING FOUNDATION CONTRIBUTED HK\$10 MILLION TO SUPPORT THE CAMPAIGN, IS PRESENTED WITH A SOUVENIR BY MR PETER WOO, HOSPITAL AUTHORITY CHAIRMAN AT THE TIME.

and construction and delivery workers.

“A lot of people in Hong Kong spend long hours at work and often suffer from a tremendous amount of pressure,” explained Dr Gary Ko, consultant at Health InfoWorld.

“They don’t have enough time to exercise and might not have access to information on how to improve their health. With this project, we aim to reach out to the grass-roots public, who are the foundation of our society. We hope that in time, they will realise the importance of a better way of life instead of relying on medication when they fall ill.” Dr Ko added that data obtained from these specific groups over the next few years will become an important source of information for the Hospital Authority and the Government, which will be able to shape healthcare policies according to the needs of society.

## IT’S ALL IN THE MIND

A healthy body means a healthy mind. So goes the old saying. But the reverse is also true. That’s why Hutchison Whampoa’s Sports and Recreation Committee has organised the Corporate Wellness Campaign.

Established this autumn with the theme “A healthy life hand-in-hand with a successful career”, the campaign takes a holistic approach to health, focusing on activities that calm the mind and help engender a feeling of general wellbeing.

“In view of the rapid and continuous growth of the HWL group, it is important for our staff to be equipped both mentally and physically to cope with non-stop challenges,” says Kelly Tam, Manager – Group Human Resources and organiser of the scheme.

Staff at all levels are encouraged to participate in activities as diverse as farm visits, cookery classes and a

series of talks giving practical advice on maintaining good mental health. These new ideas have been added to the more traditional programme of staff activities such as family days, sporting events and fishing expeditions. So far, feedback from staff has been very positive, and has encouraged the organisers to plan a series of events for next year.

Ms Tam, though, is keen to point out that the wellbeing of HWL employees has always been given top priority, and the new measures are merely an evolution of policy: “We all believe that it is an ongoing process; we should help promote and sustain such ideas amongst our staff members,” she says. “If our staff can internalise such needs a win-win situation will develop that would benefit the staff and the company.”



Two months before the campaign was launched, a pilot study was carried out of some 200 people from different industries. It revealed that 90 per cent of the participants exposed themselves to at least one risk factor in their daily lives, such as smoking, drinking, and unhealthy eating. Dr Ko said the findings confirmed that their selection of the targeted groups was appropriate. With education the key, a series of community-wide programmes will be introduced on the importance of a healthy lifestyle. There will be a particular emphasis on the risk factors associated with six major health risks – cancer, heart disease, strokes, diabetes, renal failure and respiratory problems – and measures people can take to minimise them.



A 10-part television series called *Body Talk* was produced by Television Broadcasts Ltd. and aired between July and September to pave the way for the official launch of the campaign. Each of the 10 episodes focused on people from a selected occupation, and the risks involved in their work. The series also featured celebrities who shared their secrets of good health.

Mr Li appeared in the first episode and offered a few tips on maintaining a healthier lifestyle. “Our state of health can be compared to a dam,” Mr Li said. “When small cracks appear and water starts to seep through, it will be relatively easy to fix the problem. But if we don’t do anything about it, one day the dam might give way altogether.”

“This is exactly what happens if we ignore minor ailments. These diseases might become so serious that we won’t be able to cure them even if we spend a substantial sum of money on our medical bills.”

His father’s illness and Mr Li’s own poor health when he was a child made him realise the importance of preventive medicine.

“Being ill is one of the worst experiences for anyone,” he said. “That was why I told myself that as my career took off I would definitely contribute towards the provision of healthcare.”

Over the years, Mr Li has contributed HK\$4 billion to good causes, with particular emphasis on healthcare and education which he sees as his lifelong concern.

