

For Immediate Release

“eHealth Forum” launched to promote using Information Technology in Healthcare

(Hong Kong – 15 September 2006) The eHealth Consortium today announced its inauguration and also launched the first “eHealth Forum” held on 15-16 September 2006 at the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine. The Forum is the signature event of the eHealth Consortium, a multi-sectoral collaboration in Hong Kong to promote the application and awareness of using information technology (IT) in maintaining health in the community. The objectives of the Forum was to lay the foundation for future sharing of healthcare information, envision and define a road map for the future, and to be a platform to enhance communication between the public and private sectors. The eHealth Forum 2006 has drawn an audience of about 500 including policy makers and key executives from relevant government departments and agencies as well as major corporations of both healthcare and IT industries. Distinguished guests including Ms. Sandra Lee, JP, Permanent Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food, HKSARG; Mr. Cao Rong Gui, President, Chinese Hospital Association, Past Deputy Minister of Health, PRC; and Mr. Howard Dickson, Government Chief Information Officer, HKSARG officiated the Opening Ceremony together with a number of international keynote speakers.

In the Forum, health informatics experts from China and overseas shared their latest research and experience in their countries. The keynote lectures were commenced by Mr. Carl KINKADE, Enterprise Information Manager, National Center for Public Health Informatics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, United States with the topic of “Building an Enterprise GIS at CDC to Support Public Health” and Mr. Earl MARDLE, Chairman of Jury, Stockholm Challenge 2006; Principal, KeyNet Consultancy, Australia with the topic of “Deployment, access and infrastructural preparation of an ICT response to the outbreak of human transmission Avian Influenza”. Topics on health data management, information dissemination models for epidemiological catastrophe, disease surveillance using IT, legal issues on personal privacy and data dissemination have also been discussed.

“Health informatics is about the use of information and communication technologies in healthcare to store, share, transmit and analyse clinical knowledge and data. At the present moment, the Hong Kong Hospital Authority’s Clinical Management System contains a single database of 7.6 million citizens’ records, 57 million clinic records, 540 million laboratory results, 34 million radiology results and 230 million prescriptions. This is one of the world’s largest single healthcare database that is sharable between the 40 hospitals and 120 clinics operated by the Hospital Authority. Singapore also introduced a shared electronic medical record system for exchange of electronic medical records in 2004, and spent about 2.5 per cent of the annual hospital operating budget on IT. Comparatively, Hong Kong only spent about 1.5 per cent which is below the average rate of 2.5 to 5 per cent in developed countries like the USA and UK. This demonstrates that Hong Kong is more cost-efficient in this aspect. However, there are still much room for improvement, like the extension of the sharing of healthcare information between the public and the private sectors, the latter of which caters for 10 percent of the hospital market in Hong Kong”, says Dr. Chun Por WONG, Co-Chairman, Organising Committee of eHealth Consortium and Chairman, Hong Kong Society of Medical Informatics.

“The main reasons for promoting a health data sharing system in Hong Kong are to reduce medical errors and improve efficiencies. In 2005, the Internet Professional Association (iProA), Hong Kong Society of Medical Informatics, Department of Health, Hospital Authority and the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer jointly formed a public-private-partnership - the eHealth Consortium. The Consortium focuses on three key areas, namely: Data Sharing



and Standardisation, Education and Capacity Building, and eHealth Forum which provides a platform for knowledge and experience exchange. To help build a healthier tomorrow using IT, we would like to call for support from both healthcare and ICT industries”, says Dr. Winnie TANG, Chairman, Steering Committee of eHealth Consortium and Vice President, Internet Professional Association.

In the wake of the SARS outbreak in 2003, the world is under severe threat of the H5N1 avian flu virus that has a much higher mortality rate than the SARS virus. Scientists worldwide are convinced that a pandemic is imminent which may result in a death toll in hundreds of millions if a H5N1 outbreak cannot be contained quickly at the source location. The inevitable consequential economic and social collapse of such a catastrophe, should it be allowed to happen, is unthinkable. Recognizing the important role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in support of healthcare, the Fifty-Eighth World Health Assembly called on its member states to implement plans for eHealth services for cost effective health administration, to mobilize multi-sectoral collaboration for determining evidence-based eHealth standards and norms, and electronic public health information systems for surveillance of and rapid response to disease and public-health emergencies.

Background of The eHealth Consortium

In 2003, Hong Kong was hit hard by SARS, an unknown infectious disease that threatens the life of Hong Kong people. Against such a backdrop, the Internet Professional Association (iProA) and the Department of Health jointly organised the "IT in Health Forum" in July 2003. This forum provided a platform for knowledge and experience exchange among IT and healthcare professionals in the areas of disease tracking and control. One of the highlights of the event was the publication of the "White Paper: The IT Infrastructure of Hong Kong's Centre for Disease Control (CDC)", which pinpointed the importance of data sharing and development of local expertise in public health informatics, and aroused much professional interest in the subject.

To further capitalize on awareness generated in 2003 and to further promote the use of IT in the healthcare industry, to move forward with important recommendations of the White Paper and to raise public awareness to the call of the Fifty-Eighth World Health Assembly, iProA, Hong Kong Society of Medical Informatics, Department of Health, Hospital Authority and the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer came together and founded the eHealth Consortium organization; a public-private-partnership which aims to promote collaboration between healthcare and IT professionals in both private and public sectors for healthcare services with enhanced accessibility, quality and effectiveness for a healthier tomorrow for everyone in Hong Kong.

The eHealth Consortium will deliver on its mission through implementation of initiatives that will contribute to healthcare reform in Hong Kong. Current focus is on the following 3 key areas:

1. Data Sharing and Standardisation
2. Education and Capacity Building
3. eHealth Forum

Please visit website <http://www.ehealth.org.hk> for further information.

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