

Abstract of the Proposed Project

The proposed Caregiving Research and Development Centre (CRC) will investigate caregivers and caregiving policy, practice and service. Caregivers in the CRC are unpaid, informal or family caregivers, who are distinguished from formal and professional caregivers, such as domestic helpers and nurses, etc. Caregivers are not limited to caring for the elderly but also care for people with chronic diseases and disabilities, e.g. parents with ADHD children. In view of the increasing ageing population and the prevalence of persons with chronic diseases and disabilities in Hong Kong, caregivers have a significant role to play in home care.

The ageing population trend in Hong Kong has pressurized its healthcare system, social welfare provision and community support networks. While residential care services focus on care for physically dependent senior citizens or physically and mentally disabled persons, many patients and clients stay at home because of the government's advocacy of a community-based primary healthcare and rehabilitation service model. Although the benefits of in-home care seem obvious, particularly in terms of maintaining a person's dignity, independence and social networks, it exerts considerable physical and psychological demands on the caregivers. The heavy stress and workload experienced by caregivers who are living with dependent elderly, chronically ill or disabled people is demanding. Many of them cannot deal with the pressures and eventually become victims of trauma and tragedies. The situation will likely become worse as people in Hong Kong enjoy the longest life expectancy in the world. The chronically ill and disabled population can expect to experience deteriorating health and disability as they get older.

Academic studies on caregiving in Chinese communities are growing but still limited; many of them have focused on care recipients rather than caregivers. Caregivers' financial and psychosocial needs and burdens, and their quality of life while assuming the caregiving role, are worthy of investigation so that their positive strengths and capacities can be enhanced to help them perform their caregiving role at home, and they can also enjoy better social and healthcare. Therefore, helping professionals should be informed by research to develop a paradigm shift from only taking care of patients/clients to working with both clients/patients and their caregivers. In addition, there is a need for long-term planning in caregiving policy, service and practice, especially for Chinese people, who may not totally benefit from Western research because of cultural uniqueness and racial diversity.

Emphasizing an interinstitutional and interdisciplinary approach, the CRC aims to advance academic research, teaching and learning, as well as consultancy, policy formulation and service development, to benefit caregivers who take care of frail elders and individuals with disabilities at home, to support practitioners who organize innovative caregiver service projects and to advise policymakers on issues related to caregiving. Adopting an integrative conceptual framework (see Figure 1), the research team will pay attention, during their investigation, to different needs of caregivers at various stages of caregiving, the negative and positive aspects they

encounter in daily living, the stress and coping methods of caregivers, how to release their strengths and be empowered, and how the intervention is shaped by the availability, sufficiency, timeliness and effectiveness of government policy, social services, healthcare and community resources.

The CRC will hold conferences and workshops regularly for knowledge exchange and transfer and collaborate with mainland and overseas universities and institutions as well as community stakeholders, such as practitioners, government departments, and charity, healthcare and welfare organizations, to address caregiving issues and develop the research agenda. With such fruitful exchange, the CRC will use research findings to develop possible solutions, alternative measures and innovative strategies to address the problems identified. The CRC will generate measurable impacts beyond academia for the benefit of caregivers, practitioners and policymakers.