



Board of Scientific Advisers

Research Strategy of the Centre for Health Protection

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to inform members of the Board of Scientific Advisers (BOSA) the strategy of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) to conduct and encourage research funded by the Research Fund for the Control of Infectious Diseases (RFCID) and seek members' views on the way forward.

Background

2. The RFCID was established after the SARS epidemic in 2003 under the purview of the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB) to encourage, facilitate and support research on the prevention, treatment and control of infectious diseases, in particular, emerging infectious diseases such as SARS. The Fund is designed to support studies to address specific health problems, fill scientific gaps and respond to public health threats or needs. Research projects may be one of the following types - investigator-initiated or commissioned grants.

Commissioned Grants of the CHP

3. Like the Hospital Authority, Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong, the CHP has been invited by HWFB to commission, in collaborative partnership with local agencies to undertake a portfolio of research. CHP's research proposal has three foci -



(a) Cost-effectiveness of primary prevention of infections covered (potentially covered) by the immunization programme

- Findings from such research will enable CHP to determine the immunization schedule appropriate to changing needs of the local population as well as to improve the relevance, acceptability and cost-effectiveness of the publicly funded immunization programme.

(b) Surveillance, epidemiology and public health control of infections with a regional (cross-border) significance

- Infections such as avian influenza, SARS, Japanese encephalitis, dengue fever, as well as travel-related AIDS and sexually transmitted infections have an increased propensity to spread across the border as a result of increasing volumes of traffic within the Pearl River Delta Region. The Tripartite meeting on Infectious Diseases agreed to embark on joint projects to research into the epidemiology and surveillance of diseases of common interest. Research findings will find practical applications in public health control of these diseases in the region.

(c) Prevention of spread of healthcare associated infections in community settings

- A number of infections e.g. SARS, rotavirus, scabies, antimicrobial resistance, etc. are known for their propensity to cause institutional outbreaks in community-based settings with considerable morbidity/mortality as well as generating intense public anxiety. Research findings informing about high-risk situations and relevance of infection control practices will enable evidence-based guidelines to be drawn up and best practices promulgated.

4. The CHP plans to submit the first batch of commissioned grant proposals in the first quarter of 2005. A tentative list of projects is found in the Annex. The due process of peer review will be undertaken by the RFCID. If approved, funding can be spread over a period of 3 to 5 years.

Other research themes

5. Apart from commissioned grants, the RFCID calls for investigator-initiated grant applications in accordance with stated thematic priorities. The thematic priorities for the current open call, with a submission deadline of 12 February 2005, are “infectious respiratory diseases”. Applications outside this theme will still be considered although with a lower funding preference. Well advised by seven Scientific Committees, the CHP has been tasked to inform the RFCID of research priorities in subsequent years.

Advice sought

6. Members are invited to note the three research themes of the commissioned grants, suggest research initiatives under these themes for consideration and advise in due course thematic priorities for open call submissions.

Centre for Health Protection

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**Tentative List of Research projects for Submission to RFCID for Commissioned Grant
(Position as at 18 January 2005)**

Theme	Subject of the study	CHP Coordinator
a	Evaluating the Effectiveness of Government's Influenza Vaccination Program (GIVP) in Reducing Influenza Illness (ILI) and Influenza Related Health Service Utilization in the Public Sector among the Non-institutionalized Elderly Population in Hong Kong	ICB
a	Economic analysis on inactivated poliovirus / acellular pertussis / Haemophilus influenzae b / chickenpox / pneumococcal / combination vaccines/ in Childhood Immunization Programme in Hong Kong	SEB
b	To develop epidemiological and clinical predictive markers for dengue fever among returning travelers from dengue endemic areas	SEB
b	Evaluation of ex-vivo lymphocyte assay using ESAT6 and CFP10 for the diagnosis of tuberculosis infection	TB & Chest Service
b	Improving HIV surveillance in Hong Kong through molecular characterization with a regional perspective	PHLSB/SPP
c	A comparative study for influenza, dengue fever, and Japanese Encephalitis between Guandong, Hong Kong and Macau	SEB

Themes -

- (d) Cost-effectiveness of primary prevention of infections covered (potentially covered) by the immunization programme
- (e) Surveillance, epidemiology and public health control of infections with a regional (cross-border) significance
- (f) Prevention of spread of healthcare associated infections in community settings