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## Doctors urge awareness of heart disease threat

Ng Yuk-hang

More than three-quarters of people suffering severe heart attacks do not feel any symptoms beforehand, according to statistics from a public hospital.

Among 107 patients admitted to the intensive care unit at United Christian Hospital in Kwun Tong between January and July, 76 per cent did not experience any symptoms prior to their heart attack.

Thirty-two per cent were not even aware their blood pressure, blood sugar or cholesterol level was above normal, the Public Hospital Cardiologists Association said unveiling the figures.

Association chairman Dr Stephen Tam Kin-ming estimated 10 per cent of such patients died from their heart attack, and said more people should be aware of heart disease.

Statistics from the same hospital for the past 12 months showed that among 180 patients admitted to the cardiac intensive care unit, 16 were aged under 50, of which four were under 40.

Association vice-chairman Dr Chan Kin-ming, also an associate

Silent killer

Heart disease is the city's No 2 cause of death

Among those admitted to one public hospital between January and July with severe heart attacks, this proportion did not experience prior symptoms

76%

consultant at the hospital, said that although the majority of cases involved elderly people, middle-aged people should also be on the alert.

"Middle-aged people should have body checks regularly, such as blood tests and blood-pressure checks," he said, adding that they should also exercise regularly and not smoke.

He said it was easy to mistake heart disease symptoms for less severe conditions such as stomach ache or muscle pain.

Chan cited the case of a 47-year-

old man who fainted while having a heart attack in a shopping mall last year.

Mall staff revived the man using a defibrillator and he was sent to hospital where he underwent emergency surgery, but he suffered partial memory loss from the incident which doctors said was due to his brain experiencing a temporary cut in oxygen supply.

"Before the incident, I had no idea I had heart disease. My work required me to drink and smoke a bit, and I needed to travel overseas often," the man said.

He said that after the episode, he stopped smoking, exercised regularly and ate more healthily, and subsequently recovered after three months of rehabilitation to the point where he was able to resume his job as a general manager.

Heart disease is the second-biggest killer in Hong Kong, just behind cancer. The Department of Health says 15.6 per cent of all deaths last year were triggered by heart disease.

Among the 6,400 people who died from heart disease in the city last year, most suffered from coronary heart disease.

## Boost legal aid, legislator says

Simpson Cheung

An independent legal aid authority should be set up to better help the middle class, legislator Andrew Cheng Kar-foo says.

The former Democratic Party lawmaker and solicitor yesterday renewed the calls in the wake of the Manila hostage incident.

Most victims in the incident come from the middle class, and many of them "were not eligible for legal aid and cannot afford access to justice", Cheng told the RTHK radio programme *Letter to Hong Kong*.

"Our chief secretary has said the government will assist the victims to seek justice by conducting a thorough and professional investigation," he said.

"I wish the government understood that this work cannot be achieved without a comprehensive legal aid system. This is really the time for the government to act."

Cheng said the current legal aid system was largely limited as it relied on funds retrieved from a percentage of the costs recovered from successful cases and government funding.

"If an independent body were to

be appointed, this restriction would no longer apply and further funding could be obtained commercially," he said.

He said legal aid should cover the costs for legal proceedings of any person requiring it.

He said both the Bar Association and Law Society had been calling for an expansion of the legal aid scheme for more than seven years, and even outgoing chief justice Andrew Li Kwok-nang had expressed his concern, but the calls had been dismissed by the government.

He also said the government in March had proposed raising the financial eligibility for the ordinary legal aid scheme. Currently, those with assets exceeding HK\$175,800 cannot apply.

Under the proposal, the amount would be raised to HK\$260,000. For the supplemental legal aid scheme, the cut-off amount would rise from HK\$165,700 to HK\$1,000,000.

He said the financial eligibility limits for the ordinary scheme should be HK\$350,000 and HK\$3 million for the supplemental scheme "in order to develop our legal aid system into a more comprehensive one".