

4th February 2013

SUBMISSION TO HONG KONG LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON HEALTH SERVICES REGARDING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HONG KONG CODE OF MARKETING AND QUALITY OF FORMULA MILK AND RELATED PRODUCTS, AND FOOD PRODUCTS FOR INFANTS & YOUNG CHILDREN

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to you as a mother regarding the proposed Hong Kong Code of Marketing and Quality of Formula Milk and Related Products and Food Products for Infants and Young Children (hereafter referred to as the "Hong Kong Code").

Before becoming a mother I did not know very much about infant feeding and the issues surrounding use of formula milk. However since the birth of my daughter I have come to realize just how vital breastfeeding is for the healthy development of a child. Breastmilk is an amazing substance that can solely nourish and protect throughout the first 6 months of life. It continues to provide nutritional and immune benefits through infancy and toddlerhood. Breastfeeding is something that should be supported and encouraged by the Government and Health Authority. The proposed Hong Kong Code is a major step forward for infant health and will bring Hong Kong in line with WHO and Unicef recommendations.

I find it incredible that here in Hong Kong so many mothers give their babies formula milk despite it being far inferior to their own breastmilk. One of the main reasons for this is the unrestricted and often unethical marketing of formula milk. Families are often misinformed about the health implications of these artificial milks.

Formula advertising is everywhere in Hong Kong and often makes unsubstantiated health claims. I have seen countless adverts for "Gain Plus", "Eye (I) Q Plus" and "Smart Kid" among others on public transport, billboards and in magazines. In contrast I have never seen promotional material for breastfeeding in these settings. I strongly support Article 5 of the Code to redress the imbalance and reclaim the culture of breastfeeding that has been lost in our society.

I also strongly agree with Article 6 of the code. It is unacceptable that currently formula milk can be promoted in doctors offices. I find it hard to understand how health workers concerned with infant and maternal health can allow advertising and free samples of a product that could be detrimental to the health of their patients.

I think it is right that the Hong Kong Code will not restrict the sale of formula milk and it is right that health professionals should be able to give accurate information about formula for mothers who can not or choose not to breastfeed. I also agree that the nutritional content, preparation guidelines and health risks should be clearly and prominently displayed on all packaging. It is also right that quality standards should be monitored to protect these families.

Finally I would like to say I strongly disagree with the voluntary nature of the Hong Kong Code. I urge the Government to enshrine the Hong Kong Code in legislation. I do not believe that manufacturers and retailers will adhere to a voluntary system and believe there should be penalties for non compliance. In other countries with voluntary codes there are many examples of breaches and violations.

Yours Faithfully,

Cher Ramburuth