

Opening address by S for IT at International Conference on Gerontechnology 2021 (English only) (with photo)

Following is the opening address by the Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Alfred Sit, at the International Conference on Gerontechnology 2021 at the Hong Kong Metropolitan University today (November 23):

Professor Lam (President of the Hong Kong Metropolitan University, Professor Paul Lam), Dr Choi (Associate Dean (Research and Postgraduate Studies) cum Associate Professor of the School of Nursing and Health Studies of the Hong Kong Metropolitan University, Dr Sandy Choi), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon. I am most delighted to join you all at this year's International Conference on Gerontechnology organised by the Hong Kong Metropolitan University.

Before I start, I would like to congratulate the Hong Kong Metropolitan University. I believe that with a new title more suitably reflecting its role and nature, the University will proudly advance to a bright future and will surely continue to contribute to our city, our country and humanity.

Over the past months, the epidemic situation in Hong Kong has remained stable, the Conference comes at the right juncture for us to sum up experience and prepare for the future, just as its theme "Gerontechnology in COVID-19: experience and revelation" suggests.

With our city's population ageing rapidly, there is a growing consensus on using novel technology to meet the needs of elderly and their caregivers. Gerontechnology, combining gerontology with technology, is widely recognised as a key to tackle this challenge. One of the Government initiatives at work in promoting gerontechnology is through the Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Fund (SIE Fund) under the Commission on Poverty. The SIE Fund has engaged a consortium of 10 organisations in January this year to develop and operate a one-stop Gerontechnology Platform. Through promoting participation, establishing cross-sectoral partnership and fostering collaboration, the Platform links up different stakeholders on the supply and demand sides to enhance the synergistic effect in order to promote the development and application of gerontechnology in Hong Kong. This would enhance the welfare, living quality, independent living skills and self-care capabilities of the elderly under the new normal, and provide support to their families, carers, care workers and care providers.

Apart from this flagship project, the SIE Fund has also been funding social entrepreneurs, companies and organisations to take forward innovative

projects to address social needs using innovative ideas, services and products. I am glad that the SIE Fund has already supported about 50 projects targeting elderly with the adoption of technology. These projects have reached out to over 13 000 elderly in need.

On the other hand, to promote wider use of technology to enable an active and healthy living of the elderly in the community, the Government has been running the \$1 billion worth-Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care since 2018 to help elderly and rehabilitation service units procure or rent technology products to improve the quality of life of service users and reduce pressure and burden on care staff. So far, over \$380 million of subsidy has been approved for more than 1 300 elderly and rehabilitation service units to procure or rent around 10 000 technology products, benefitting thousands of our elderly.

To drive the adoption of gerontechnology, we need more research and development, R&D. To this end, the Government has been providing funding for R&D centres, designated local public and academic research institutes, as well as private companies through various schemes under the Innovation and Technology Fund to encourage more R&D projects and devise technology solutions related to gerontechnology. The Health@InnoHK has also been set up at the Hong Kong Science Park as a research cluster to attract talents around the globe.

The Policy Address this year has put forward a number of I&T initiatives that are forward-looking and groundbreaking. One of them is the setting up of an InnoLife Healthtech Hub in the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park in the Lok Ma Chau Loop, with the 16 life and health-related laboratories in the InnoHK research clusters and the eight State Key Laboratories in life and health disciplines as the basis, to focus on related research work. This is a good illustration of Hong Kong's advantages and strengths in scientific research. My Bureau, the Innovation and Technology Bureau, has been tasked to press ahead with this initiative and I look forward to seeing the Hub come into play and gerontechnology-related research outcomes turn into products in the years to come.

All the things that I have said could not be done by the Government alone. We need the full support from everyone in the society. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Hong Kong Metropolitan University for organising the Conference again this year. Promotion and partnership are of paramount importance. Our Conference today is an important platform connecting various stakeholders. This major event offers great opportunities linking up academics, researchers, service providers, both NGOs (non-governmental organisations) and the private sector, as well as suppliers. And we are more than happy to play our part in fostering a vibrant gerontechnology ecosystem within which wider cross-sector collaboration will bear fruit. You can rest assured that our support for gerontechnology will continue to strengthen.

Before I close, may I wish the Conference a great success and all of you a most rewarding experience. Thank you very much.

