General Circular No.21/2015
(to be circulated to all staff, students and notice boards)

Dear all,

Re: Advisory on tuberculosis (TB)

The University has just been notified by the Department of Health that one of our full-time students has contracted tuberculosis (TB). This student has been hospitalized and is now receiving medical treatment and care. As Tuberculosis is a common and air-borne infectious disease, the Department of Health is working closely with the University Administration to follow up with the necessary medical screening for close contacts of this student. The University would like to give the following health advisory to the University community.

According to the Department of Health, TB is still a common disease in Hong Kong and around 5,000 cases are notified to the Department of Health each year. The annual TB notification rate is around 70 cases per 100,000 population.

TB is an airborne infectious disease caused by a germ called Mycobacterium tuberculosis, also known as tubercle bacilli. It usually affects the lung, but it may occasionally affect other organs like lymph nodes, bones, joints, vertebral spine, brain, and kidney, etc. When the disease affects the lung or the airways, the germ may sometimes be seen in the sputum under the microscope among the infectious cases (“Open” TB).

When a patient with “Open” TB coughs or sneezes, small droplets containing the tubercle bacilli are generated. These droplets can stay in the air for a long time when ventilation is inadequate. TB infection may occur when another person breathes in these small air droplets. Prolonged exposure, however, is usually required for the infection to be transmitted. Even if infected, only one in ten on average will ever develop disease, typically after months or years.
The risk of TB infection through casual contact is generally low. However, we should remain vigilant for typical symptoms that may suggest TB disease, such as persistent cough, blood-stained sputum, loss of body weight, fever, and night sweating. Early medical attention should be sought if such symptoms develop. The Department of Health provides free diagnostic and treatment services for TB through 12 full-time and 5 part-time chest clinics distributed in different parts of Hong Kong. For information about TB and government chest clinics, please visit the website http://www.info.gov.hk/tb_chest.

I wish to remind all colleagues and students of the following preventive measures in an effort to reduce the risk of infection in our environment:

1. Maintain good personal and environmental hygiene.
2. Adopt a healthy lifestyle, i.e., have balanced diet, adequate exercise and rest.
3. Keep hands clean and wash hands properly.
4. Wash hands when they are dirtied by respiratory secretions e.g. after sneezing.
5. Cover nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing and dispose of nasal and mouth discharge properly.
6. Seek treatment promptly if symptoms similar to tuberculosis appear, particularly persistently cough for more than one month.

Staff members are also reminded to note the following health reporting arrangement:

- When a staff member has a TB-like symptom, he/she should seek medical consultation immediately. Please keep the University informed at unit level (i.e., unit head through his/her supervisor), including the development of his/her case.

- In the event that a staff member has been suspected or confirmed with MERS infection, he/she should inform the HRU (HR Hotline X6333) immediately through his/her unit head. He/she should follow medical/CHP’s advice and should not come back to work. He/she should inform the University of the development of his/her case.

Students should channel their cases and concerns to their teachers and if needed, could also seek assistance from me or the University’s OSH Co-ordinator, Mrs. Cybill Lam at 2768-6288 or clam@ouhk.edu.hk.
Your cooperation in making our OUHK environment a safe and healthy one will be much appreciated. Thank you.

Professor LEE Wing On
Chair,
Emergency Health Response Committee
5th November 2015