

K4 – Delivery of Health Services: Systems for Health: The Emerging Sciences



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Professor Yeoh is Director at the JC School of Public Health and Primary Care of CUHK. His research is in health systems, services and policy with an interest in applying systems thinking in studying how the complex components of health systems interact and interrelate to improve health. He is involved in global collaborative work with research networks.

Professor Yeoh served as the Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food of the HKSAR Government between 1999 and 2004. From 1990 to 1999, he was head of the Hong Kong Hospital Authority. As a clinician, he pioneered public health programmes in the prevention of Hepatitis B and HIV/AIDS. He was awarded JP in 1993, OBE in 1997 and GBS in 2005 in recognition of his public service.

The two critical challenges in improving the health of populations are the ability to understand: i) the multiple and complex factors of the determinants of health, and ii) the nature of health systems as complex adaptive systems. Interventions to improve population health are implemented in complex human ecosystems which are dynamic and adaptive and influenced by individuals, the communities they reside in, social processes and the wider social, political and economic environment. In a review, Balas & Boren concluded that it may take 17 years for 14 percent of original research to turn into clinical applications and even longer to have an effect on population health.

Systems thinking is enabling us to better understand the inter-relations and inter-actions of the different components of health systems. System science has been increasingly applied in health systems research using mixed methodologies from different academic disciplines, fostering the development of new sciences.