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A Professional Dialogue with Honorary Advisor Dr. LEUNG Kin-ip, Kenneth: What Works to Achieve Excellence in Correctional Services



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Introduction of our Honorary Advisor Dr. LEUNG Kin-ip, Kenneth

Dr. LEUNG Kin-ip, Kenneth, CSDSM, the former Deputy Commissioner (Rehabilitation and Management), has been appointed the Honorary Advisor on rehabilitation services following his retirement from the Correctional Services Department (CSD). With nearly 30 years of experience in the Rehabilitation Division and the Operations Division, Dr. LEUNG is well-recognised for his



strategic leadership, extensive expertise in correctional services and academic achievement – a Doctoral Degree in Social Work, which together positions him as a leading figure in the field. Dr. LEUNG was invited to an exclusive interview with Senior Clinical Psychologist, Dr. Yvonne LEE to share insights into the continuous evolution of rehabilitation for persons in custody (PICs), explore advancements in correctional rehabilitation researches, and examine best practices, emerging challenges and future directions within this pivotal domain.

Dr. LEE: As you're the driving force behind the establishment of the Correctional Rehabilitation Research Unit, it is our honour to seek your insights into the promotion of an evidence-based approach in correctional rehabilitation. In your view, how does professional research advance the Department's vision, mission and values?

Dr. LEUNG: While defining successful rehabilitation is inherently complex, **research serves as the backbone** for enhancing the effectiveness of rehabilitation services for PICs. By providing evidence-based insights, research tells us what works for diverse offender populations with distinct characteristics - including short-termers, lifers and others. Updated literature on Risk-Needs-Responsivity Model, Good Lives Model and Desistance theories also allows for the refinement of intervention methods tailored to their specific needs.

Besides, research enables the CSD to evolve as a **learning organisation**, integrating academic knowledge and practical experience to devise strategic approaches that address PICs' needs - even at an individualised level. This multidisciplinary, holistic framework ensures that rehabilitation initiatives are not only grounded in robust research but also responsive to the unique needs of local PICs and correctional settings.

By combining local research findings with correctional staff expertise, the CSD can **formulate long-term strategies to develop individualised, effective and sustainable rehabilitation services**, reinforcing its commitment to rehabilitative success and upholding its core values.





Leveraging professional research, staff experience and PICs' perspective to enhance excellence in correctional services

Dr. LEE: The Department has devoted substantial efforts and resources to addressing PICs' needs, focusing on reducing re-offending and ensuring appropriate rehabilitation programmes during incarceration. Could you share your thoughts and experiences in handling PICs' rehabilitative needs?

Dr. LEUNG: Before designing rehabilitation programmes, it is essential to conduct **thorough research** to gain a comprehensive understanding of the diverse characteristics of PICs. This principle initiated the Study on Risks and Needs Assessment and Management Protocols for Offenders in Hong Kong two decades ago as well as the subsequent review study in recent years. **Collecting information directly from PICs** using these locally developed tools is of paramount importance, as effective rehabilitation has to be handled on a case-by-case basis, even among individuals of similar ages, offences, personalities, etc. The process involves **analysing offence patterns, identifying underlying reasons for the criminal behaviour, assessing re-offending risks and evaluating their specific rehabilitative needs.** The “one-size-fits-all” approach is inadequate, as effective rehabilitation requires interventions tailored to each PIC's background, motives of offence and criminogenic needs.

Dr. LEE: Yes, research provides valuable insights into effective rehabilitation. However, given the financial strain, scarcity of resources in

prisons and manpower shortage, what measures would you consider helpful for our correctional services?

Dr. LEUNG: To address these challenges, correctional services must evolve with the times by embracing technological advancements that enhance security, efficiency and rehabilitation outcome. Innovations such as **digitalised visits, e-messaging, robot patrols and unit management** offer us opportunities to streamline prison operations within the existing financial and manpower constraints. Thanks to modern technologies, we have introduced innovative services to strengthen family connections for PICs, improve surveillance and optimise administrative processes. By integrating technological solutions to provide support for PICs who are detained under a stressful custodial environment, both individuals and society can benefit as a whole, paving the way for more effective and humane correctional services.

Dr. LEE: Correctional officers are often described fulfilling dual roles as “Society’s Guardian” and “Rehabilitation Facilitator”. Beyond ensuring safety, security and good order within correctional institutions, they also contribute to the rehabilitation of PICs. In this regard, what advice would you give our staff to meet these expectations?

Dr. LEUNG: Prison is a miniature of society, where PICs interact with our staff in their everyday lives, building up complex relationships. Adopting **rehabilitative security approach** empowers correctional officers to supervise PICs with a balance of discipline and support, thereby fostering their successful reintegration into society. This approach also enhances officers’ job satisfaction as they take pride in contributing to changing lives for the better (Lee, Hung, Tam & Chau, 2023). Programmes like the **Ethics College** play a vital role by reinforcing education and job opportunities, instilling prosocial values, and most importantly, providing opportunities for upward mobility for PICs upon their release.

Practically speaking, to establish a rehabilitative culture within correctional facilities, we are required to shape an environment where correctional officers act as case managers. This entails maintaining supervision while providing care, similar to how **good parents raise children with structure while fostering growth and development**.

Dr. LEE: Our services rely heavily on our frontline staff, as they interact with PICs all the time. What recommendations would you give the management on how to support our frontline staff so that they could perform their duties



without undue stress?

Dr. LEUNG: **Staff training** is crucial to equipping correctional officers with the necessary skills in security, rehabilitation and counselling for fostering the reintegration of PICs. Drawing inspiration from the movie Good Will Hunting 《驕陽似我》, we see the transformative power of empathetic mentorship in unlocking the potential of PICs and guiding them towards a bright future.

In addition, **motivation** is a key drive for both PICs and our staff. For PICs, incentives like education or reduced sentences encourage commitment to rehabilitation; as for our staff, recognition and purposefulness make their dedication sustainable.

Counseling skills that emphasise active listening and empathy help build trust, address trauma and promote a constructive relationship between staff and PICs, which altogether create an environment conducive to positive changes. On the contrary, stereotyping PICs as merely “criminals” should be avoided, as such labelling dehumanises individuals and provokes rebellious, anti-social behaviour.



A rehabilitative security training session delivered by clinical psychologists in HKCSA

Dr. LEE: **Correctional literature highlights a strong relationship between the job satisfaction of correctional staff and the successful rehabilitation of PICs. Do you have any comments on how to enhance staff morale in the current circumstances?**

Dr. LEUNG: Staff well-being is undoubtedly invaluable - not only to the organisation but also to PICs who strive for reintegrating into society. One effective initiative is the implementation of humanity-focused workshops under “**Project E**”. These workshops aim to **improve staff well-being, reduce stress**, and at the same time **foster a more rehabilitative environment** by promoting empathy and understanding towards both colleagues and PICs.

Furthermore, we should let **frontline staff share their success stories**, showcasing their dedication and value of their services. This approach raises awareness, reduces stigma, and highlights the impact of their efforts. Adapting this model could involve structured sessions where staff reflect on transformative moments – whether helping PICs with reintegration or overcoming personal challenges. When it comes to job satisfaction, providing staff with opportunities to speak out for themselves will let them feel being recognised, find meaning in their roles and rediscover the worthiness of their work.

Dr. LEE: Thank you very much, Dr. LEUNG, for sharing your views on how to use research evidence to enhance our rehabilitation services. As most of correctional staff do not have regular access to academic journals, how can we effectively share research findings with our colleagues, particularly from the perspectives of correctional staff?

Dr. LEUNG: The Correctional Rehabilitation Research Unit can establish a research library with a collection of journal articles relevant to our correctional services. To facilitate learning, we can also encourage correctional officers to engage in research initiatives or make presentations to senior officers, bridging theoretical knowledge with practical application and seamlessly integrating research findings into **staff training**. Fostering intellectual engagement boosts **staff motivation** - recognising officers’ contributions instils a sense of autonomy and competence, effectively mitigating burnout. I sincerely hope that a vibrant research culture will gradually flourish within the Department. I look forward to receiving updates on this progress.

Dr. LEE: Of course, we are always eager to share our progress with you. We hope this will not take away your well-deserved time pursuing your hobbies such as first-person view drone piloting and physical fitness courses. We sincerely appreciate your time and invaluable wisdom, which give meaningful directions for our research unit to make impactful contributions. Thank you again for your unwavering support and insightful guidance.



Insights

1. Research as Backbone

Research serves as evidence-based foundation for rehabilitative policies and practices, driving the department's development into a learning organisation that fosters continuous professional growth among correctional staff.

2. Insights from Real Life Experiences

To understand the rehabilitative needs of PICs, nothing works better than firsthand insights from frontline staff and PICs, whose lived experiences reveal the daily challenges and the concealed needs.

3. Embracing Innovation in Prison Management

Given the ever-evolving needs of PICs - just like how needs of children are always changing - prison management must uphold an open mindset, embracing the latest research insights and making good use of modern technology to enhance rehabilitative efforts

References

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