



## Risky Communications and Uncertain Outcomes

R Fielding<sup>1</sup>, WWT Lam<sup>2</sup>, GM Leung<sup>1</sup>, TH Lam<sup>1</sup>, AJ Hedley<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Departments of Community Medicine and <sup>2</sup>Nursing Studies,  
The University of Hong Kong

Richard Fielding joined HKU in 1982 and has been head of the Behavioural Sciences Unit of the Department of Community Medicine since 1985. His research interests include health care communications, particularly related to oncology, cardiology and more generally risk perception and its role in behaviour change from the perspective of population-based behaviour change and related risk communications. His current activities include pan-Asian studies of infectious disease risk perception and communication.

### Background

The purpose of most public health risk communication efforts is population-wide behaviour changes. Most attempts to achieve this involve the communication of a few relatively simple messages underpinned by a signal-detection theory model developed in the 1930s. However, the literature on risk perception and communication suggests that people's interpretation of both risks and communications about risk are subject to significant psychosocial influences that distort or lead to rejection of messages. Moreover, the communication of a message can become enmeshed in countervailing agendas and be distorted by the very means used to disseminate it.

### Methods

This will be illustrated using data from a recent study performed in HKSAR on risk perceptions associated with live poultry sales in HK and the attempts made to communicate this information through the media.

### Outcomes

The presentation will end with an analysis of the problems encountered and the implications of these for health risk communications in HKSAR.