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**Headline: Reshaping Hong Kong's path to modernisation**

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One of Hong Kong's most enduring qualities is its ability to cope with challenges. It has seen off war, refugee crises, rapid population growth, the passing of the colonial era, financial meltdowns, bubbles and political disquiet. It has also had to deal with public health emergencies which pose serious threats to our safety and our economy. The older generation will remember the flu epidemic in 1968, while, more recently, concerns about "bird flu" were significant in the late 1990s and then SARs in 2003.

But is it enough just to "cope"? Unfortunately, the manner in which our city has endured over the years highlights an important aspect of our character: Hong Kong has never been much of a leader. It is not a city that innovates. It adapts, for sure. It follows, and it responds, but it does not set the pace. It can make money, but has it invested in all the right areas?

Consider Hong Kong's relationship with the animal world. We don't seem to recognise that the natural world and the environment are fundamental to our survival and identity as humans. For all its breathtaking energy, Hong Kong cannot consider itself truly modern unless it recognises the interdependency between humans and animals. I am talking about understanding zoonotic diseases and the One Health movement, which is aimed at creating an inclusive relationship between medical doctors and veterinarians. I am talking about food safety and public health in general; I am talking about food production, such as aquaculture; I am talking about animal welfare, how we treat animals, not just companion animals, but all living creatures.

One way we hope to modify the mindset in Hong Kong is through a new undergraduate degree in veterinary medicine at City University of Hong Kong. In collaboration with Cornell University, we want to tackle infectious diseases, develop new career paths for Hong Kong's youth, improve animal welfare, and enhance the well-being of our natural living environment.

Hong Kong can truly impact the world through leadership in veterinary medicine. Vets aren't just for sick pets; veterinary medicine will enable this city to reshape its path to modernization and truly make an international name for itself.