

# Air pollution aggravating asthma symptoms in Macau

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**I**N addition to many other respiratory diseases, air pollution is contributing to aggravate asthma symptoms in the region, local physician Alvis Lo has indicated. Speaking to the Times on the sidelines of a panel discussion on air quality organized yesterday by the Association of Macau Portuguese-speaking Physicians (AMLPM), the expert on respiratory diseases stressed that "air pollution is one of the major triggers of asthma in this region."

He recalled that, actually, asthma is a genetic disease and if we are not contact with a possible trigger, sometimes symptoms might not get too worse. However, in the region, air pollution is playing a role in triggering the disease's symptoms.

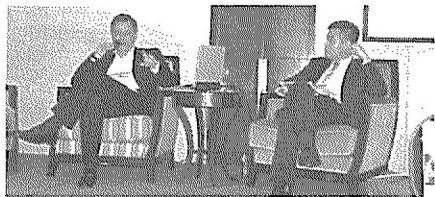
Nevertheless, Mr Lo stressed that Macau's air quality isn't such a big problem as in major Chinese cities such as Beijing or Shanghai, where air pollution is clearly severe.

In his presentation, the local physician recalled a recent World Health Organization report showing that, globally, 7 million deaths are caused by air pollution.

In Macau, he believes that there are two main causes of pollution in terms of outdoor areas: traffic and factories operating in neighboring Chinese regions. When it comes to indoor areas, he mentioned that there have been improvements since the anti-tobacco law was implemented.

"We know that in October casinos will be implementing a full smoking ban, so we can see that the government is keeping an eye on the problem," he told The Times.

Pollution issues are contributing to aggravate cardiovas-



António Trindade and Alvis Lo

cular and respiratory diseases and, in particular, outdoor air pollution is also causing lung cancer. "Now there is solid evidence that severe pollution triggers lung cancer," he said.

The physician added that although tobacco is also responsible for lung cancer, more cases of people who do not smoke and suffer from the disease have emerged: "In recent years, we dealt with more lung cancers from people who do not smoke, so possibly there are environmental factors like pollution [playing a role too]." He stressed that the World Health Organization has already alerted that outdoor air pollution is, indeed, carcinogenic.

But how to tackle air pollution in Macau as the city's economy is booming and further developments are in place? Mr Alvis Lo believes that everyone should be living a greener life; those

with respiratory issues should reduce physical exercise, particularly in more polluted areas. Furthermore, the government could "provide legislation on controlling vehicle emissions or limit the number of cars."

On the regional side, he stated it is crucial to reduce factory and power plant emissions.

The President and CEO of CESL Asia, Mr António Trindade, also a guest speaker at the event, shared a similar opinion when it comes to measures that can be taken by each and every one of us to tackle pollution-related matters.

"Everyone uses air conditioning, everyone uses cars, and everyone uses some sort of energy (...) so there is a need to be more conscious. I think people are starting to realize this negative impact on their life quality (...) and everyone needs to contribute [to tackle the issue]," he said.

Moreover, he believes that Macau is not doing enough to resolve the pollution. Mr Trindade stated that, although actions have been taken in that direction, there is still a need for more, and clearer "political initiatives" that should be put in place.

In his presentation, Mr Trindade revealed that the largest contributor to air pollution is, in fact, Guangdong province. But he noted that we are obviously affected by locally produced pollution, as "Macau has the world's highest traffic density." Bringing in about 30 million visitors annually also contributes to poor air quality at times, he added.

Looking into what other regions have done to tackle the smog, António Trindade provided a few suggestions on how to improve our air quality: prioritizing the LRT; encouraging walking and cycling; improving energy efficiency of buildings; introducing co-generating and distributed energy of cooling/heat and power; and improving methods of biological waste management, among others.

He is convinced that the consequences of air pollution will go beyond what people can tolerate, therefore he has no doubt that something will be done to reverse the current situation.

## Health sector: "One of the greatest polluters"

**C**ESL Asia's Chief Executive Officer, Mr António Trindade, has indicated that "the health sector is one of the greatest polluters." He added that this constitutes "a paradox in Macau, since these services have been truly committed to improving indoor air quality" by helping set up a smoking ban inside buildings.

Speaking on the sidelines of a panel discussion on air quality organized by the Association of Macau Portuguese-speaking Physicians (AMLPM), he added that sometimes "we do not see the same commitment [from the Health

services] in places where they work."

In his presentation, Mr Trindade also addressed the issue and stressed that, despite World Health Organization's recommendations and public interest, "Indoor air quality in hospital and medical facilities is not given the same attention as other facilities with [similar] intense usage, under private management." He concluded by saying that, in this matter, he hopes to see improvements in the new public hospital to be built in Taipa.