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香港律師會

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10 March 2020

Ms. Maria Ślązak
President
The European Association of Lawyers

Dear Ms. Ślązak,

COVID-19

Everyone around the world is working hard to keep COVID-19 under control and to minimize its rippling effects on different aspects of life.

We are proud to be a part of the global legal fraternity. As a member of this big family, we write to send our best wishes for the health and safety of every legal practitioner in your jurisdiction.

We also take the opportunity to share an update of the situation of the legal profession in Hong Kong and of the measures that the Law Society of Hong Kong has taken to assist the profession in these difficult times.

- (a) The Law Society has given advice to law firms on management issues that may arise during the outbreak of COVID-19:
- (i) For adequate precautions to protect their staff and people attending their offices, law firms are referred to the Centre for Health Control for useful guidance on infection control measures.

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- (ii) It is important to ensure that clients' interests are protected at all times. The management issues that may arise in the current public health situation vary from firm to firm depending on many factors such as the client base, type of work handled, money held in clients' accounts, management of cheque books and accounts, number of clerks, time limits due, etc. Firms are reminded that should practitioners wish to work from home, depending on whether the physical offices of their law firms can still fulfil the supervision requirements under the relevant provisions in the Solicitors' Practice Rules, they will need to consider closing the offices to the public if the statutory minimum supervision standards are not met.
 - (iii) In the event that law firms have decided to temporarily close their offices, the Law Society provides a facility via the members' zone of our website to inform all members of any special arrangement regarding the opening hours and dates of law firms.
 - (iv) Practitioners have also been urged to be sympathetic to requests for reasonable extensions of time, subject to clients' instructions, in these extraordinary circumstances.
 - (v) Law firms are reminded to prepare themselves for the possibility of infection or close contact with an infected person within their own staff, or a quarantine order being imposed under the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation Cap. 599C, or other measures taken by the Government following the COVID-19 infection. These possible scenarios will have major impact upon the operation of law firms.
 - (vi) Law firms are reminded to enquire from the Building Management what steps they will take to disinfect an office and how long that will take and how rapidly it can be completed after notification. For sole proprietors, it may be necessary to consider taking active steps to set up a "buddy system", i.e. to set up a relationship with another firm so as to provide timely support to each other in the event that either firm is suddenly prevented from practising for some days. In such a fluid situation, we have to be well prepared with a contingency / business continuity plan that fits the needs of our own practices, ensuring that there are adequate arrangements in place to cope with difficulties that may arise.
- (b) The Law Society has also distributed an aide memoire to assist members to formulate a Disaster Recovery Plan to meet individual needs.

- (c) Owing to public health considerations, continuing professional development (“CPD”) courses have been suspended in February and March. To address the concern that practitioners may be left with fewer choices of CPD activities for compliance with the relevant statutory obligations due to the temporary suspension of courses, the Law Society will be implementing measures that will effectively allow members more time to complete their obligations.
- (d) The supply of surgical masks has been tight as the demand is so high. The Law Society’s Member Services Department has been trying hard to source surgical masks for members as a member benefit. We are very grateful to the kind referrals received from friends both locally and abroad who have been immensely helpful to us in our attempts to source supplies of surgical masks. Such is the power of mutual support and assistance within the Law Society’s well established global network of legal connections.
- (e) You may have been aware that there has been a general adjournment of court proceedings in Hong Kong since 29 January 2020 for the protection of the health of all court users. The Judiciary has been working out the resumption arrangements and it is expected that the general adjournment period will end from 23 March if public health situation permits.

We hope that the outbreak of COVID-19 will be under control soon and we will continue to strive hard to assist our members to sail through the challenge.

All the best and please stay safe and healthy!

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MK Pang', with a large, stylized loop at the end.

Melissa K. Pang
President
The Law Society of Hong Kong