

**Subcommittee on Improvements to the
Medical Complaints Mechanism
LegCo Panel on Health Services
Subcommittee Meeting on 3 July 2001**

**An Introduction to
the Complaint Handling Process of Private Hospitals**

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to give a brief account on the complaint handling process of the private hospitals for members' information.

Background

2. The Director of Health is responsible for the registration and inspection of hospitals, nursing homes and maternity homes in accordance with the Hospitals, Nursing Homes and Maternity Homes Registration Ordinance (Cap. 165). As the licensing authority, the Department of Health (DH), conduct regular inspection and promulgate guidelines to private hospitals on patient care and other relevant public health issues. Private Hospitals are required to furnish annual reports, survey report for re-registration and reports on medical incidents to DH.

Complaints Handling Process

At the service delivery level

3. It has generally been recognized that the most effective and efficient way to handle complaints is to resolve them at the service delivery level. Therefore, all private hospitals are required to have in place a mechanism to handle complaints.

4. Firstly, all hospitals are required to appoint a patient relation officer who will receive, investigate and resolve complaints received by each individual hospital.

5. Secondly, the hospitals have, on the advice of DH, put up in prominent places, notices regarding the channels of complaints, namely, the patient relation officer of the hospital, the Department of Health, the Board and Councils of respective medical and paramedical professions and the Hong Kong Medical Association Patients' Rights and Responsibilities Hotline.

6. Thirdly, the hospitals are required to submit on a monthly basis, a complaint digest, which provides a summary on the nature of complaints and the outcome of investigations by the hospitals to enable DH to have an understanding of the level of performance of the hospitals in handling complaints. Where appropriate, DH may provide advice to hospitals on how to avoid further complaints. In 2000, a total of 490 complaints were received and handled by the 12 private hospitals.

At the level of licensing authority

7. The DH also undertakes investigation into complaints received from clients of private hospitals. The hospital administration will be asked to provide an explanation on the allegations of the complaints and their actions in handling the complaints. In the course of investigation, the Director of Health or persons duly authorized by the Director are empowered to enter and inspect the premises and any records. After investigation, DH will furnish a reply to the complainant on the findings of the investigation. Where the complaints involving system errors in hospital management, DH will direct the hospitals to take appropriate measures to rectify such errors. However, on issues relating to professional misconduct, the complainant would be advised to refer his case to the respective professional regulatory body.

8. In 2000, a total of 24 complaints on private hospitals were received by DH. Nine of these were found to be substantiated, with three concerning staff performance, one on staff attitude, two on administrative procedures, one on environment, one on charges and one on other issues.