



Ms Doris CHAN

Clerk to Subcommittee Legislative Council Building,
6 Jackson Road,
Central,
Hong Kong.

Paper No. CB(2)2289/00-01(01)

Dear Ms CHAN,

Re: Subcommittee on improvements to the medical complaints mechanism

Thank you for inviting our Association's comment for the above captioned item.

Based on our members' suggestion, the Hong Kong Association of Speech Therapists would like to make the following comments:

(1) Membership of the Medical Complaint Committee

The current medical complaint mechanism is led by medical officers. The public might have the belief of favourable condition for the medical practitioners in case of medical negligence.

We propose that the board of regulatory party should be comprised of medical officers provided that there is an effective self-monitoring mechanism. The medical officers are the only qualified professionals who can judge the appropriateness of medical treatment. They understand the medical background of patients and the risks and complications of alternative medical treatments. Therefore, they are equipped with necessary professional knowledge and skills in making unprejudiced judgment in case of medical incidence and to guard against mal-practices. However, in order to avoid misunderstanding from the public, the current medical complaint system should be improved by allowing greater degree of transparency. The public should be provided with opportunities to understand the procedure of handling medical complaints. When investigation is completed, the medical complaint committee should formally announce the result of the investigation. Relevant parties and professionals should also be consulted where necessary.

(2) Monitoring by Professional Bodies

Monitoring of service standard by professional bodies will definitely reduce the incidence of complaints. Speech Therapists are PROFESSIONALS who assess, diagnose and provide treatment for clients presented with speech, language, swallowing and/or associated communication disorders (please refer to the fax that

attached a pamphlet concerning our scope of services). The clients range from young infants in neonatal intensive care unit to the elderly in old aged homes who are at high risk of aspiration due to dysphagia. Speech therapists, being members of the multi-disciplinary team in various settings, must be qualified to give good quality of services in order to prevent complaints from malpractice. At present, there is no legal consequence for malpractice (by those who have not got the relevant professional qualifications) and there are evidence of some mal-practices happening. Unfortunately, the Hong Kong Association of Speech Therapists is not yet a registered body for professional regulation. Thus, we strongly urge the Government and relevant bodies to assist us in the process of registration.

There are 180 qualified speech therapists working in Hong Kong. Nearly one-third of them are working in Hospital Authority. The remaining two thirds are working in Department of Health, educational settings (i.e., special schools and Education Department) and non-governmental organizations. Up to now, it is fortunate enough that we have not received any serious complaints from the public. However, we need to work for the best but prepare for the worst. In reviewing the current medical complaint system, we desperately find the need to consider including the monitoring of speech therapy service, as a significant proportion of speech therapists are working in the medical and health care settings. The urgency of setting up a self-monitoring regulatory system for speech therapists is thus of paramount importance.

I would like to stress again that the current speech therapy service provision by qualified speech therapists is of professional standard. The registration serves to, i. assure the provision of service by qualified personnel, ii. to help maintaining high service standard, iii. the establishment of the registered professional body will help setting up of an objective complaint system.

I would be grateful if you can pass the views of our members to the Subcommittee, making them available on the website of the Council, to the media and the public. We would appreciate if you could consider our participation in the future meetings concerning the issue. Please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned via e-mail: hkasts@netvigator.com or fax:23845214.

Yours sincerely,

(Ms Sarah CHAN)

Chairperson of Hong Kong association of Speech Therapists 00-01