

16th July, 2001

Hon Law Chi Kwong
Legco Panel on Health Services Subcommittee

Dear Mr. Law

Re: Medical Complaints

Much has been said and written on the medical complaint mechanism in recent times. Mostly this has been related to ensuring the process is equitable, open, and simple. These views have been very thoroughly examined by many sectors of society and will not be repeated here. However there is one aspect to this matter that has received little or no attention.

Any complaint results from a conflict or dispute between two parties. As the aggrieved party, the complainant is always assumed to be the victim and all current efforts are directed to assisting the complainant in filing his or her complaint. At present, private hospitals receive numerous complaints on a regular basis. Many of these complaints are made by patients in the heat of the moment. Many concern trifling matters, for example if the patient does not like the doctor's appearance or if the patient considers that a 15-minute wait to see the doctor is unacceptable. Nevertheless, every complaint needs to be investigated, recorded, reported to the authorities and otherwise serviced. This is a huge drain on manpower, often a wasteful exercise, and ultimately leads to increasing the cost of medical services. Whereas it is entirely laudable that patients should be treated fairly and should not suffer as a result of arrogance of the medical providers, complainants should also act responsibly and not impulsively. A method needs to be devised to ensure that the complainant can justify the complaint in some way and to bear some responsibility for the action taken. Unfortunately the present situation has no means to separate the genuine from the frivolous complaints. For example, in the first six months of 2001, out of 19 complaints only six were found to be of substance. We would welcome suggestions on how this can be resolved in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to file this submission.

Sincerely,

Dr. A.E.J. van Langenberg
Hon. Medical Superintendent
Canossa Hospital (Caritas)
Hong Kong