

LegCo Panel on Health Services
Meeting to be held on 17 July 2001

Nursing Manpower in Public Hospitals

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the nursing manpower in public hospitals.

Staffing Position

2. Nursing care plays an important part in the delivery of health care services by the Hospital Authority (HA). As at 31 March 2001, there were 19 746 nursing staff in HA, representing 39.5% of HA's entire workforce. Qualified nurses are the mainstay of HA's nursing manpower. As at 31 March 2001, 92.4% of HA's nursing staff are qualified nurses.

3. Arising from the upgrading of basic nursing education from hospital-based nursing education to degree level in tertiary institutions, there has been a change in the staff mix in HA. The number of trainee nurses has declined since 1999, from 3 971 in 1999 to 1 497 in 2001. The decline is offset by an increase in the number of qualified nurses from 16 644 in 1999 to 17 342 in 2000, and further to 18 249 in 2001. As a result, the qualified nurse to bed ratio has improved from 0.60 in 1999 to 0.63 in 2001 (details at Annex). Such a change in staff mix will not affect the quality of nursing care. The quality of health care services can be further enhanced with strengthened qualified nurse manpower. It should also be noted that trainee nurses need to spend about one-third of their working hours attending classes, and in discharging their duties, they have to work under the supervision of qualified nurses.

4. To cope with the increase in workload and enhance the quality of nursing care, HA plans to recruit in 2001-02 about 1 150 registered nurses and 100 enrolled nurses graduating from its nursing schools, and 142 nursing degree graduates from local universities. The number of qualified nurses is expected to increase to 19 028 in 2001-02.

Measures to Relieve Workload of Nurses

5. Apart from strengthening the qualified nurse manpower, HA has also introduced measures to alleviate the workload of nurses. These include :

(i) Health Care Assistant Scheme

HA introduced the Health Care Assistant Scheme in 1993 to strengthen nursing support to patients and relieve nurses of simple care duties. The duties of health care assistants include the provision of personal care and nursing care of low complexity to patients. Such duties include feeding and bathing patients, helping patients to get out of bed, turning a patient's positions, etc. HA estimates that about 10 to 15% of nursing duties which are of simple nature could be delegated to these health care assistants. Over the years, HA has strengthened the manpower of health care assistants from 3 825 in 1999 to 4 138 in 2001, and the health care assistant to bed ratio has improved from 0.139 to 0.143 (details at Annex).

(ii) Recruitment of Care Assistants

To strengthen personal care and supporting services in hospital wards, HA plans to employ about 1 900 care assistants in 2001/02. As of end May 2001, about 1 300 care assistants have been recruited.

(iii) Streamlining Work Process

To streamline the work process, nurses, doctors and other health care professionals now record patients' progress on the same progress sheet. Such an arrangement can reduce duplications and improve communication between health care professionals.

(iv) Concentration on Clinical Duties

Nurses are no longer required to perform non-clinical and indirect clinical duties in nurse quarters, central sterile supplies department, etc. Also counting and ordering ward supplies such as cleansing materials, hospital supplies, stationery and medical consumables, are now looked after by the central supporting teams.

Contingency Arrangements

6. To cope with the surges in workload in various departments within a hospital, many hospitals have set up central nurse staff pools to facilitate redeployment of nursing staff to cope with service demand. Also, the HA Head Office has a central pool of nurses for deployment to hospitals on a need basis to cope with fluctuations in the workload in different hospitals. At present, the central pool comprises 169 nurses.

Impact of Enhanced Productivity Programme (EPP)

7. To achieve the target savings under EPP, HA has been implementing various initiatives, including rationalization of hospital services, integrating and streamlining management and administrative functions, reengineering work processes and implementing energy conservation projects. The guiding principle for implementing these EPP initiatives is that under no circumstances should the quality of hospital services be compromised. The EPP notwithstanding, HA has increased and will continue to increase the number of qualified nurses to enhance the quality of nursing care to patients (see paragraphs 3 and 4 for details).

Way Forward

8. Nursing manpower as well as the workload of frontline nursing staff have always been a concern of HA. HA will continue to explore further measures and opportunities that can help alleviate the workload of nurses and enhance effective utilization of nursing manpower.

Advice Sought

9. Members are requested to note the contents of this paper.

**Health and Welfare Bureau
July 2001**

**Qualified Nurse, Trainee Nurse and Health Care Assistant
to Bed Ratios**

| | March 1999 | March 2000 | March 2001 | March 2002 (estimate) |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| No. of Hospital Beds | 27 544 | 28 517 | 28 877 | 29 022 |
| No. of Qualified Nurses | 16 644 | 17 342 | 18 249 | 19 028 |
| Qualified Nurse to Bed Ratio | 0.604 | 0.608 | 0.632 | 0.656 |
| No. of Trainee Nurses | 3 791 | 2 538 | 1 497 | 323 |
| Trainee Nurse to Bed Ratio | 0.138 | 0.089 | 0.052 | 0.011 |
| No. of Health Care Assistants (including Care Assistants) | 3 825 | 3 868 | 4 138 | 6 038 |
| Health Care Assistants to Bed Ratio | 0.139 | 0.136 | 0.143 | 0.208 |