

For discussion on
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**Legislative Council Panel on Health Services
Meeting on 12 May 2003**

**Progress on the Registration of
Chinese Medicine Practitioners in Hong Kong**

Introduction

This paper seeks to brief Members on the latest progress of the registration of Chinese medicine practitioners (“CMP”) in Hong Kong.

Background

2. In 1997, the Chief Executive announced in his Policy Address the Administration’s commitment to establish a sound regulatory framework for Chinese medicine to safeguard public health and to develop Hong Kong into an international centre for Chinese medicine. Following the enactment of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance (“the Ordinance”) in July 1999, the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong (“the Council”) was established under the Ordinance in September 1999 to devise and implement regulatory measures for the practice, use, trading and manufacture of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong. The subsidiary legislation for the registration of Chinese medicine practitioners was subsequently made in June 2000. Since then, the Council has gradually put in place various regulatory measures including the registration, examination and disciplinary systems for CMPs. In the long-term, only registered CMPs will be allowed to practise in Hong Kong. To become a registered CMP, one must satisfactorily complete an approved undergraduate degree course in Chinese medicine practice and pass the Licensing Examination. Registered CMPs must also comply with the Code of Practice laid down by the Council and satisfy the requirements for continuing education in Chinese medicine as stipulated in the Ordinance.

Transitional Arrangements for CMPs

3. In order not to affect the livelihood of CMPs, the Ordinance provides for transitional arrangements for practising CMPs to allow them to continue their practice. According to the Ordinance, any person practising Chinese medicine on 3 January 2000 in Hong Kong may apply to the Council within the specified period for his name to be entered in the list maintained under section 90 of the Ordinance. Listed CMPs who hold academic qualifications recognized by the Chinese Medicine Practitioners Board (Practitioners Board) and have continuously been practising for a specified period in Hong Kong will be exempted from the Registration Assessment or the Licensing Examination. For other listed CMPs, they will be required to pass the Registration Assessment or Licensing Examination to qualify as a registered CMP.

Cut-off Date of the Transitional Arrangement for CMPs

4. According to the Ordinance, the Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (SHWF) is empowered to specify and promulgate the cut-off date of the transitional arrangement for CMPs by notice in the Gazette. After that date, only registered CMPs will be permitted to practise Chinese medicine in Hong Kong. SHWF will take into account factors in the public interest, including the latest development of the CMPs at that time, and the views of the community before deciding on the schedule for putting an end to the transitional arrangement. SHWF will inform the Legislative Council Panel on Health Services prior to the publication of the notice in the Gazette.

Registration of CMPs

5. The Practitioners Board promulgated the names of listed CMPs in December 2001.

6. The Practitioners Board completed the vetting of the experience and academic qualifications of listed CMPs in August 2002. Among them, 2 543 applicants were eligible to apply for direct registration, while the rest were required to sit the Registration Assessment Examination or the Licensing Examination.

7. The Council promulgated the list of the first batch of 2 384 registered CMPs in the Gazette at the end of November of the same year. At present, there are about 5 500 listed CMPs.

CMP Registration Assessment and Licensing Examination

8. The CMP Registration Assessment was held in January and February 2003, and was attended by more than 2 200 listed CMPs with an overall passing rate of over 80%. Candidates were notified of their assessment results individually in early April. This means that over 1 000 listed CMPs will be qualified to become registered CMPs. The Practitioners Board will arrange another registration assessment for the absentees later this year.

9. The first CMP Licensing Examination will be held in August 2003. Eligible candidates for the examination include: (i) listed CMPs who are required to take the Licensing Examination under the transitional arrangements for CMPs; and (ii) holders of an undergraduate degree in Chinese medicine or equivalent recognised by the Practitioners Board.

10. The CMP Licensing Examination will comprise of 2 parts, including a written examination in Part I and a clinical examination in Part II. The written examination will be in the form of multiple choice questions while the clinical examination will take the form of an interview.

11. The Practitioners Board has formulated clearly and precisely the scope and form of the examination, the details of which can be found in the Candidates' Handbook for Chinese Medicine Practitioners Licensing Examination. The handbook was first published in February 2002, a copy of which was mailed in December to each listed CMP required to take the Licensing Examination.

Assessment of Chinese Medicine Degree Courses

12. According to the Chinese Medicine Ordinance, applicants who sit the Licensing Examination have to satisfy the Practitioners Board that at the time of the application they have satisfactorily completed such undergraduate degree course of training in Chinese medicine practice or equivalent as approved by the Practitioners Board.

13. Basic requirements for the Chinese medicine undergraduate degree course as laid down by the Practitioners Board encompass:

- (a) no less than five years of full-time Chinese medicine undergraduate degree course or equivalent, with at least 30 weeks of clinical internship;
- (b) the course should cover ten compulsory subjects: Chinese medicine basic theory, Chinese medicine diagnosis, Chinese medicine, formulation science, Chinese internal medicine, Chinese surgery, Chinese gynaecology, Chinese pediatrics, Chinese orthopaedics and traumatology and Chinese acupuncture.

14. These courses also have to meet the basic requirements of a university programme and those of clinical teaching, including teaching performance, facilities for teaching/conducting experiments, teaching administration, library resources, staff qualifications, admission level and clinical practice. Chinese medicine being a medical profession, the Practitioners Board does not accept any distance learning or part-time programmes.

15. Last year, the Practitioners Board completed an assessment on the full-time undergraduate degree courses in Chinese medicine being offered by three local universities, namely, the University of Hong Kong, the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Baptist University. All these courses have met the above-mentioned requirements and hence secured the Practitioners Board's approval. At the same time, the full-time undergraduate degree courses offered by 27 Mainland Chinese medicine universities/colleges recognised by the State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine have also been recognized by the Practitioners Board. As regards other Chinese medicine courses, the Practitioners Board will assess them on their own merits in line with the basic requirements for undergraduate degree courses.

16. For students enrolled in the non full-time undergraduate degree courses in Chinese medicine run by the University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Baptist University before 2002, the Practitioners Board, after careful consideration, has decided to permit them to sit the Licensing Examination when they have satisfactorily completed their degree courses. As regards students who are currently enrolled in diploma courses in Chinese medicine offered by local universities, the Practitioners Board has permitted those who have taken part-time diploma courses in Chinese medicine from the University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Baptist University before 2002 to sit the Licensing Examination after they have switched to and completed the relevant bridging course and part-time/full-time degree course in Chinese medicine.

17. Students and graduates of the Professional Diploma in Chinese Medicine (offered by the Hong Kong Baptist University) and the Bachelor of Health Science (Chinese Medicine) (jointly organised by the Hong Kong Baptist University and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University) had requested the Practitioners Board to allow graduates of these two courses to sit the Licensing Examination. As the curriculum and standard, duration of studies and clinical internship of these two courses fail to meet the basic requirements of undergraduate degree courses in Chinese medicine, the Practitioners Board decided that graduates of these courses can sit the Licensing Examination as long as they have studied and satisfactorily completed the bridging course and degree course in Chinese medicine.

Chinese Medicine Training

18. Professional education or training for health care professionals is generally arranged by their respective professional bodies to cater for their individual needs. The Administration will not be directly involved in the provision of any centralized training. At present, many Chinese medicine educational institutions offer Chinese medicine courses in different modes or at different levels to cater for listed CMPs with varying experience and academic qualifications.

Continuing Education for Registered CMPs

19. The Chinese Medicine Ordinance stipulates that registered CMPs have to fulfill the requirement regarding continuing education on Chinese medicine set by the Practitioners Board before they can apply to the Board for the renewal of their practising certificates every three years. The objective of the requirement is to enhance the knowledge of registered CMPs in Chinese medicine, promote their awareness of the latest development of Chinese medicine and maintain their professional standard.

20. The mechanism for facilitating CMPs to engage in continuing training is being devised. In this connection, the Practitioners Board is in the process of formulating the overall framework, continuing education requirements and the accreditation system of the relevant subjects. The Practitioners Board will consult local Chinese medicine practitioners associations widely before the introduction of the system.

Disciplinary Mechanism for CMPs

21. According to the Chinese Medicine Ordinance, registered CMPs and listed CMPs must abide by the Code of Practice for Registered Chinese Medicine Practitioners and the Code of Practice for Listed Chinese Medicine Practitioners respectively, which lay down the guidelines on discipline, professional responsibility, professional ethics, ambit of practice, medical practice and practice promotion for CMPs, so that their practice can conform to the professional standards and conduct.

22. The Practitioners Board may hold a hearing on CMPs who are in breach of the Code of Practice, and take appropriate disciplinary action as and when necessary, including the removal of the names of the practitioners concerned from the List of Registered Chinese Medicine Practitioners or the List of Listed Chinese Medicine Practitioners.

Discussion

23. Members are invited to comment on the above work progress and the way forward.

Department of Health
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