

18 June 2004

Dear Dr. Lo, Ms Lum and Mr. Mak,

Concern on the Nursing Manpower Shortage

I appreciate very much that all of you are working very hard for the health care in H.K.

I would like to express to you my concern on the nursing manpower shortage in H.K. To me, it is a problem to nursing and health care in present and future. The suffering is not just applied to small private hospital like mine (I am working in Evangel Hospital). All the private hospitals are troubled by the quick movement of nurses, difficulty in recruitment and competition for nurses. As far as I know, D.H. & H.A. are facing the same problem though the damage is not so obvious to be seen right now due to their big reserve. We do employ agency nurses for temporary relief. But without a reliable nursing manpower supply, our existing staff work harder and more stressful, the quality of care provided is marginal and the level of supervision and monitoring is even more difficult.

I don't know whether the calculation of nurses needed in the society has included the staff from VER & increasing demand of nurses for community work. Recently, the SWD stresses a lot on elders and disable people care should be back to community. As the result, more and more nursing manpower is drained to the community rehabilitative and maintenance care. Of course, working in community means that there is less chance of having night shift duty and this attracts nurses too. In fact, with the great negativity and low morale of staff in HA as well as unclear future of staff in D.H., more and more nurses prefer working in the community. It is sad to see that experience nurses equipped with update acute care knowledge and skills move to the less complicated settings. And the less experience and new nursing staff taking up the complex care in hospitals without adequate practical clinical support. In fact, the quality of care and safety to patients, staff and health organizations are compromised.

I would like to know if there is any short term strategy and long term planning in addressing this issue?

Since we have a lot of experience in conducting better nursing education, would the re-opening of some hospital-based nursing programs with subsequently conversion degree could solve the problem?

Should there be a thorough re-assessment of nursing manpower needs in the society as a whole and increase the funding for nursing education in universities?

I trust that all of you are influential people who can do something more for the health care system in H.K. Looking forward to your view and actions in improving the situation.

Regards,

Rosita Ho

Nursing Director of Evangel Hospital