

LegCo Panel on Health Services

Nursing Manpower

Purpose

This paper sets out for Members' information the present situation with regard to nursing manpower in Hong Kong.

Manpower Situation

2. As at 30 April 2005, there were 24 008 registered nurses with Practising Certificates and 9 171 enrolled nurses with Practising Certificates in Hong Kong. According to the findings of Health Manpower Survey¹ conducted by the Department of Health in 2000, about 84% of the registered nurses who reported to be active worked in the public sector (i.e. Hospital Authority (HA) and Government), about 11% in the private sector and about 5% in the academic and subvented sectors. In the case of enrolled nurses, about 54% of the respondents who reported to be active worked in the Hospital Authority, 21% in the private sector, 16% in the academic and subvented sectors and the remainder in Government.

3. In the past few years, there has been a decrease in the number of nursing graduates. The details of the number of registered and enrolled nurses who graduated from the relevant nursing courses and the projected numbers for the coming three years are set out below.

¹ Health Manpower Surveys are conducted regularly by the Department of Health on the healthcare personnel practising in Hong Kong. The Surveys aim to obtain up-to-date information on the characteristics and employment status of all healthcare personnel working in Hong Kong. The latest available results cover the 2000 Survey and the 2003 Surveys on Doctors and Dentists have been published through the DH website. The findings of the 2004 Surveys on different types of registered healthcare personnel will be available soon.

No. of nurses graduated						Projected no. of nursing graduates		
	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
RNs	1 257	1 268	416	358	336	516	567	597
ENs	313	123	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	1 570	1 391	416	358	336	516	567	597

The substantial decrease in the number of nursing graduates in 2002-03 was due to the cessation of student intake to the nursing programmes run by the HA since July 1999. The decision to cease student intake was made having regard to the trend of reduction in wastage rate of nurses and changes in the skill mix and the mode of delivery of healthcare services. The decision was also in line with the Government's policy of upgrading basic nursing education to degree level for enhancing the quality of healthcare services. This was reflected in the steady increase in the number of places in degree level nursing programmes over the past few years. In the academic year 2004-05, 450 first-year-first-degree places (FYFD) (in full-time-equivalent terms) and 138 first-year-sub-degree places (in full-time-equivalent terms) in nursing education are provided by the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions. The number of FYFD places in nursing by UGC-funded institutions will further increase to 518 in the 2005-06 to 2007-08 triennium. In addition, the Open University of Hong Kong will start two new four-year nursing degree programmes this September offering a total of 100 places. We estimate that the long term requirement for additional nurses, including the requirement of the public medical sector, the private medical sector and the welfare sector, would be about 600 a year. Since the supply of new nursing graduates is expected to increase from 516 in 2005-06 to 567 in 2006-07 and around 600 in subsequent years, there may still be undersupply of nursing graduates for a couple more years but the situation should improve after 2007.

Public Hospitals and Department of Health

4. In the context of the HA, the vacancies not filled after the relevant recruitment exercises in 03-04 and 04-05 were 11 and 77

respectively. The Department of Health did not experience any difficulty in filling its nursing vacancies over the same time period. However, the Administration does not have exact information on the number of nursing vacancies in private hospitals and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), although some of them have indicated difficulties in recruiting ENs.

Private Medical Sector

5. The nursing manpower situation in the private medical sector would depend very much on the demand for services in this sector. Nonetheless, we anticipate that the estimated annual additional requirement of 600 nurses is a reasonable estimate and adequately reflects the demand in the private sector. Given the relatively low supply of nurses in the past two years, the private medical sector has indicated difficulty in recruiting nurses. Again, we expect the difficulty to be temporary. The situation should improve when the supply of registered nurses increases in the coming years.

The Welfare Sector

6. In the welfare sector, we are aware of the difficulties in recruiting and retaining nursing staff. The shortage of nursing manpower experienced by some of the NGOs may post operational difficulties. In response, the Social Welfare Department in cooperation with the Hospital Authority and NGOs has recently organized two sessions of career talks to students of Higher Diploma in Nursing of Queen Elizabeth Hospital² to familiarize them with the working environment in residential care homes for the elderly and encourage them to join the welfare sector. Furthermore, a recruitment talk targeted at retired nurses is also planned to be held in August to encourage retired nurses to join the welfare sector. We are also considering other feasible ways to deal with the shortage of nurses in

² To alleviate the problem of shortage of nurses in the short term, the HA is conducting a three-year Higher Diploma in Nursing at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Nursing School for three years starting from 2002-2003. Students will graduate in 2005 (105 graduates), 2006 (111 graduates) and 2007 (100 graduates) respectively. The number of graduates is reflected in the total number of graduates as shown in the table in paragraph 3.

the welfare sector, including the possibility of providing a one-off training programme of enrolled nurses to address the specific needs of the welfare sector. Other bridging over measures, such as offering one further course of Higher Diploma Programme, is also being actively considered. It should be noted that such 'blister' programmes are only pragmatic interim measures to address a short-term supply problem particularly in the welfare sector. This would not in any way affect Government's commitment of upgrading of basic nursing education to degree level.

Health Welfare and Food Bureau
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