

**For discussion on
12 November 2007**

Legislative Council Panel on Health Services

Progress Report on Registration of Chinese Medicine Practitioners

PURPOSE

Matters relating to the registration of Chinese medicine practitioners (“CMPs”) were discussed by the Panel on Health Services at its meeting on 14 May 2007. This paper updates Members on the latest developments.

**LATEST POSITION OF LISTED CMPS ATTAINING
REGISTRATION STATUS**

2. The registration system for CMPs was an important issue in the drafting of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance. The Legislative Council had thoroughly discussed the system and the Administration had consulted different sectors of the community and the Chinese medicine profession. The registration system for CMPs aims to ensure the professional standard of CMPs and protect the health and well-being of patients. Under the system, any person who wishes to apply for registration as a registered CMP must first complete a recognized Chinese medicine undergraduate degree course and pass the CMP Licensing Examination.

3. When implementing the registration system for CMPs, the Administration was aware that there were then quite a number of practising CMPs. It therefore suggested making transitional arrangements for those practising CMPs to continue their practice as listed CMPs. Based on their practising experience and academic qualifications, those listed CMPs were allowed to get registration through three avenues of the transitional arrangement provided for under the Chinese Medicine Ordinance. The three avenues include (i) direct registration; (ii) passing the Registration Assessment; and (iii) passing the

CMP Licensing Examination. The details are set out in **Annex**.

4. As at 30 September 2007, 4 953 listed CMPs have been registered as registered CMPs. A total of 25 listed CMPs passed the CMP Licensing Examination held in 2007 and were qualified for registration. At present there are still 2 856 listed CMPs. Among them, 60 are qualified for registration but have yet to register whereas 1 850 have never applied for undertaking the CMP Licensing Examination.

ADMINISTRATION'S SUPPORT TO LISTED CMPs

5. The transitional arrangement is intended to let listed CMPs have ample time to further study and subsequently get registration by passing the CMP Licensing Examination. The Administration appreciates that some practising listed CMPs may not be familiar with the examination as a mode of assessment. To assist and encourage them to take the CMP Licensing Examination, the Department of Health (DH) has organized talks on examination skills for listed CMPs annually since 2003 to familiarize them with the format of the Licensing Examination so as to help them better demonstrate their mastery of Chinese medicine in the examination. The Chinese Medicine Practitioners Board ("Practitioners Board") under the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong ("CMC") is very concerned about the registration of listed CMPs. It recommends the industry as well as related organizations to organize well-structured training courses on Chinese medicine practice with longer duration for listed CMPs, and encourages listed CMPs in need of training to attend the courses with a view to improving the passing rate and standard of practice. To address the needs of listed CMPs, some local Chinese medicine organizations have offered training courses to teach them the necessary Chinese medicine knowledge to prepare them for the examination. Moreover, a listed CMP organization has successfully applied for funds from the Professional Services Development Assistance Scheme to organize professional development programmes.

6. To encourage listed CMPs to take part in the CMP Licensing Examination without compromising the professional standard in Chinese medicine practice, the Practitioners Board has introduced in the CMP

Licensing Examination for 2007 some new arrangements, including: (1) allowing the candidates to retain a pass in any one paper of the written examination taken in or after 2007 for three years and to re-sit the other paper; (2) simplifying the question form of all multiple-choice questions in the written examination; (3) re-grouping the 20 subjects of the written examination into 13 subjects; and (4) allowing candidates to choose clinical cases to answer. Subsequent to the introduction of the four new arrangements mentioned above, the number of listed CMPs applying for taking the Written Examination has increased from 233 in 2006 to 384 in 2007.

7. We have followed up the proposals put forward by Members at the meeting on 14 May 2007 to enhance our assistance to listed CMPs. A Member proposed that training courses on the CMP Licensing Examination be included in the list of reimbursable courses for the Continuing Education Fund. The DH and the Secretariat of the CMC have referred the proposal to the Labour and Welfare Bureau and explained to it the background of the CMP registration system. In addition, a Member proposed that in the course of its talks on examination skills for the CMP Licensing Examination, the DH should brief the participants on the common mistakes made by candidates in the past. The DH already included a session on “common mistakes of candidates” in its training talk on examination skills on 28 May 2007. As to the proposal of a Member that the Practitioners Board should make public the questions and answers of the past CMP Licensing Examinations, the Practitioners Board is of the view that this may induce candidates to learn by rote on the basis of past questions and answers, which may affect the professional standard of the CMP Licensing Examination. The Practitioners Board therefore considers it inappropriate to publicize the questions and answers of the past examinations.

8. We will continue to maintain contact with the Chinese medicine profession, and hope that all practising CMPs can eventually attain the standards expected of registered CMPs so as to ensure the standard of the profession as a whole and to protect the health and well-being of the public.

PART-TIME DEGREE COURSES IN CHINESE MEDICINE

9. At the last meeting, Members requested us to provide further information to explain why the two part-time degree courses in Chinese medicine offered by the Xiamen University in collaboration with the Open University of Hong Kong and by the Hong Kong College of Technology in collaboration with the Jinan University were not accepted as recognized courses for the CMP Licensing Examination.

10. To ensure that Chinese medicine degree courses reach the requirements and levels of those courses recognized by the Practitioners Board, the CMC established the Committee on Assessment of Chinese Medicine Degree Courses (“the Committee”) under the Practitioners Board in June 2001. The Committee is responsible for assessing the standards of undergraduate degree courses in Chinese medicine and to make recommendations to the Practitioners Board. In December 2002, the Practitioners Board announced, for the first time, the basic requirements for recognised courses, which include-

- (i) such course must be a full-time undergraduate degree course with duration of not less than five years, including a clinical training of not less than 30 weeks; or its equivalent;
- (ii) such course must include the ten compulsory subjects on Chinese medicine designated by the Practitioners Board;
- (iii) no part of such course is conducted by means of distance learning (such as correspondence course or internet training programme); and
- (iv) the institute offering such course fulfils the basic requirements for a university and for clinical teaching.

11. The practice of CMPs is closely related to the health of the public. Therefore, the Practitioners Board considers that for students to complete satisfactorily an undergraduate degree course in Chinese medicine, they should have received comprehensive and fundamental university education as well as undergone full-time learning. Students

should also be provided with adequate opportunity to practise continuously in order to complete all the relevant clinical training and experiments. A full-time on campus learning environment is an important component of quality teaching. To maintain the professional standard and status of CMPs, and with regard to the corresponding licensing requirements for other healthcare professions (e.g. medical practitioners and dentists), the Practitioners Board considers that the full-time mode of education should be adopted for the recognized courses for the CMP Licensing Examination.

12. The degree courses in Chinese medicine offered by the Xiamen University in collaboration with the Open University of Hong Kong and by the Hong Kong College of Technology in collaboration with the Jinan University are both part-time instead of full-time courses, so they do not meet the basic requirements of recognized courses.

13. In view of the historical circumstances of Chinese medicine education in Hong Kong universities, the Practitioners Board assessed the part-time degree courses in Chinese medicine offered by the University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Baptist University since 2000 and 1998. After careful consideration, the Practitioners Board decided that students enrolled in the above courses in or before 2002 could sit the Licensing Examination when they had satisfactorily completed the courses. However, this was an exceptional and one-off arrangement and should not be extended to other part-time degree courses in Chinese medicine, especially non-local courses.

14. The above policy has been scrutinized by the court in a relevant judicial review case, and has been accepted and approved of. A student of the part-time degree course in Chinese medicine jointly offered by Jinan University in collaboration with the Hong Kong College of Technology applied for judicial review of the decision of the Practitioners Board not to approve the course concerned. However, the judicial review and the appeal were dismissed in June 2006 and March 2007 respectively. Noting that the Practitioners Board has all along been rejecting part-time undergraduate degree courses in Chinese medicine jointly run by non-local universities and local education institutes, the Court of Appeal of the High Court considered that it was justified for the

Practitioners Board not to approve part-time degree courses in Chinese medicine offered by non-local universities and it could not be faulted for making a limited exception only in respect of universities in Hong Kong.

15. As to Members' suggestion that the CMC should meet the institutions offering the above two courses, the Chairman of the Practitioners Board already attended a Legislative Council case conference on 5 July 2007 and explained to attending Members the decision made by the Practitioners Board on the issue of recognizing the above two courses and the underlying rationale. Besides, at the request of the Li Ka Shing Institute of Professional and Continuous Education (LiPACE) of the Open University of Hong Kong, both the Chairmen of the CMC and the Practitioners Board met its Director on 10 May 2007 to explain why the part-time degree course in Chinese medicine offered by the LiPACE in collaboration with the Xiamen University was not recognized. The Practitioners Board subsequently gave a written reply to the LiPACE on 11 July 2007. The LiPACE wrote to the Practitioners Board on 11 September 2007, saying that the course had been revised and asking the Practitioners Board to recognise the revised course and to provide an opportunity for the graduates and students of the course to sit the CMP Licensing Examination. With regard to the rationale of adopting the full-time mode of education for recognized courses in paragraph 11, the Practitioners Board decided to uphold the decision of not recognizing part-time courses and gave a written reply to the LiPACE on 11 October 2007.

16. On 17 July 2007, the Jinan University wrote to the Practitioners Board requesting a re-assessment of its part-time degree course in Chinese medicine organized in collaboration with the Hong Kong College of Technology. In the written reply on 30 August 2007, the Secretary of the Practitioners Board informed the university that the course would not be recognized as it was a part-time course.

17. The Practitioners Board has already explained adequately to the institutions and students concerned on the requirements of recognized courses and the reasons for not recognizing the two aforementioned courses. The Practitioners Board has also been in liaison with the universities and students all along regarding this issue.

CONCLUSION

18. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

**Food and Health Bureau
Department of Health
November 2007**

Avenues through which listed CMPs can obtain registration

Category One

Applicants, who have been practising Chinese medicine in Hong Kong continuously for not less than 15 years immediately before 3 January 2000, shall be exempted from the Licensing Examination and Registration Assessment, and can apply to be registered Chinese medicine practitioners directly.

Category Two

Applicants, who have been practising Chinese medicine in Hong Kong continuously for less than 15 years but NOT less than 10 years immediately before 3 January 2000 and have obtained academic qualifications acceptable to the Practitioners Board, shall be exempted from the Licensing Examination and Registration Assessment, and can apply to be registered Chinese medicine practitioners directly.

Category Three

Applicants, who have been practising Chinese medicine in Hong Kong continuously for less than 15 years but NOT less than 10 years immediately before 3 January 2000 and have NOT obtained academic qualifications acceptable to the Practitioners Board, shall pass the Registration Assessment conducted by the Practitioners Board before they are qualified to apply for registration. Applicants who fail the Registration Assessment have to undertake the Licensing Examination.

Category Four

Applicants, who have been practising Chinese medicine in Hong Kong continuously for less than 10 years immediately before 3 January 2000 and have obtained academic qualifications acceptable to the Practitioners Board, shall pass the Registration Assessment conducted by the Practitioners Board before they are qualified to apply for registration. Applicants who fail the Registration Assessment have to undertake the Licensing Examination.

Category Five

Applicants, who have been practising Chinese medicine in Hong Kong continuously for less than 10 years immediately before 3 January 2000, and have NOT obtained academic qualifications acceptable to the Practitioners Board, shall pass the Licensing Examination before they are qualified to apply for registration.