

24 April 2009

Chairman and Members of
Panel on Health Services
Legislative Council

Dear Sirs and Madams,

Long continuous work hours of frontline doctors of Hospital Authority

We note from your webpage that one of the outstanding items for discussion is on the Interim review outcome of pilot Doctor Work Reform programmes. The Administration and HA has to, among others, report the outcome of the review on the pilot schemes launched for implementing the Doctor Work Reform Recommendation Report to the Panel before the expiry of the last legislative session.

It was recommended in Interim Pilot Report on Doctor Work Reform that HA to consider gradually implementing a modified on-call system in order to reduce their continuous work hours towards the **longterm target of 16 on weekdays and 24 at weekends as well as public and statutory holidays**. In the interim, HA to consider attaining 100% compliance with post-call half-day time-off granted to all doctors on overnight onsite call and arranging mutual-cover sleep time for 4 consecutive hours for those who were on **overnight on-site duty exceeding 24 hours, subject to adequate workforce, operational practicability and service sustainability**.

In providing the report on the outcome of the review, we think the Administration or the HA will provide similar report to you. We can foresee that the Administration and HA will report the increase in resources and the number of doctors to the Panel. That in fact may be only adequate for alleviating the increase in workload due to increase in population.

We hope you would urge the HA to set reducing the continuous work hours of doctors as priority since this is directly related to the lives of patients and clinical incidents. Though it was reported in a small number of specialties in some hospitals had reduced the continuous work hours from 28 to 16 hours, the

majority of houseman and junior doctors are still working from 7 or 8 a.m. until 5 or 6 p.m. the next day.

Can you always work over 30 hours without sleeping? Treating a patient under such tiring condition in fact jeopardize the lives of patients. Are these doctors not human and do not need to rest after working long hours? Are lives of patients in HA hospitals not important?

We can never understand why frontline doctors who are treating patients have to work such long hours but not other professions or those taking up managerial work doctors in HA headquarters.

Will you ask the HA to list out the continuous work hours of houseman and junior doctors of all specialties and all hospitals? You will see how serious the situation is.

As the Legislative Council has the responsibilities of monitoring the work of the Government, the life to the public is very important. We hope you would play your role and look into the long continuous work hours of frontline doctors. We hope you will not just say this is an old problem and the HA is improving. Do you understand the pace is very slow. Why such malpractices can continue for such long time? HA even says for the long term (nobody knows how long it means? ten, twenty or thirty years?) target, the doctors will still need to work 24 hours. Can you count how many deaths are or will be due to the wrong judgement of tiring doctors?

Shortening the long continuous work hours is not just for the benefits of frontline doctors but for saving lives which are so precious.

Dear Legislative Councillors, we hope you can do something really helping the community.

Yours sincerely,

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