



**Hospital Authority
2007
Annual report of the Public Complaints Committee
and the Complaint Management Section of HA Head Office
Executive Summary**

I. Background

Since its inception, the HA has established a two-level complaints system to handle complaints. The system aims to provide a readily accessible mechanism to deal with all complaints. All first-time complaints are handled by the respective hospitals/clinics in the first instance. Complainants who are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaints can appeal to the Public Complaints Committee (PCC) for a review of their cases. In the HA Head Office, the Complaint Management Section (CMS) has dual roles: (a) as Secretariat of the PCC; and (b) responsible for the overall coordination of the HA's complaint management.

2. In addition to its role as the final appeal body, the PCC also assists the HA to ensure effective governance and public accountability in complaint management. Thus, the PCC formulates and reviews policies and guidelines, and introduces initiatives, and in accordance with its terms of reference, monitors the effectiveness of the HA's complaints management which covers broadly the work of the CMS and complaint handling of all hospitals. The initiatives and achievements in 2007 are detailed in the Annual Report ("the Report") in the Annex. A brief summary is given in the ensuing paragraphs.

II. Work of the PCC in Complaint Handling

Analysis of trends of Complaints, Appreciation and Feedback

3. To ensure proper handling of complaints, the PCC through its Secretariat collates and monitors the volume, nature and trend of complaints and appreciations received by all HA hospitals. To further help gauge public perception on public hospital services, statistics on public feedback are also collected and analysed. During the reporting period, the HA and its hospitals received a total of 2,483 complaints, 26,330 appreciations and 12,303 feedback items. The statistics concerning complaints¹, appreciation² and feedback³ for the past 5 years are presented in Appendix 3 of the Report.

¹ Complaint - an expression of dissatisfaction

Workload and Performance

4. The PCC held 23 meetings, processed 258 appeal cases and concluded 218 cases (84%). Of the 218 concluded cases, 148 cases (68%) were completed within the performance target of 3 to 6 months. The trends and categories of all PCC cases, i.e. appeal cases, were also monitored, and data on the categories of complaints over the past 5 years are shown in Appendix 4 of the Report.

5. In all appeal cases the PCC conducted a fundamental review of all the facts and issues and if deemed necessary, interviewed the parties concerned. In most cases the PCC found that the subject matter of the complaint had been properly dealt with by the hospital concerned. Out of the 218 appeal cases only 8 were found to have been substantiated and 4 partially substantiated.

6. For the detailed analysis of the unsubstantiated cases and the PCC's observations made in the course of complaint handling, please see Para 22 to 27 of the Report.

Initiatives to improve the HA's complaint handling work

7. In addition to the handling of appeal cases, the PCC implemented 2 improvement initiatives and made recommendations in 2 major areas as follows :

- a) System and procedural improvement
 - i) Met with UK Consultants to explore further improvement to the complaints system and procedures
 - ii) Three PCC Members joined the HA Task Force to plan and develop the launching of an HA-wide Patient Satisfaction Survey
 - iii) Appointment of independent medical specialist(s) to enhance the robustness of early assessment of appeal cases
 - iv) Sharing of observations and mutual exchange with medical experts in Psychiatry, Paediatrics, Ear, Nose and Throat in complaint cases
- b) Communication to promote leadership, culture and governance

² Appreciation – an expression of gratitude

³ Feedback - an expression of opinion

in complaint management

Conducted communication forums :

- i) for Patient Relations Officers of all public hospitals in February 2007
- ii) for the Doctors' Staff Consultative Committee in June 2007

Recommendations

8. Based on the observations from the cases and insights gained in the course of complaint handling, the PCC has made recommendations in the following 2 areas for improvement :

- a) Care of dying patients and acute bereavement for relatives

Breakdown or inadequacy of communication in the care of dying patients is a major cause of complaints in Hong Kong and the UK NHS. The PCC recommended the HA enhance its staff's awareness of the sensitive feelings of patients and their family. Through its Secretariat, the PCC also shared its observations in the complaint cases so as to help the hospitals better handle dying/deceased patients and bereaved families.

- b) Managing public expectation on thrombolytic therapy

Patients and the public have increasing awareness of the potential benefit of thrombolytic therapy in ischaemic stroke but little knowledge of the eligibility criteria and complications of this treatment. The PCC recommended the HA develop a local protocol and provide public education on the therapy which would in turn help front-line clinicians better explain to patients/public and reduce unnecessary complaints.

III. Work of the CMS in complaint handling

Workload

9. In 2007, the CMS handled 9,906 cases of feedback/informal complaints from complainants, provided executive support to the PCC on the handling of 258 appeal cases, took up 55 cases from The Ombudsman and processed 2,299 cases channelled to the HA Head Office. Details are in Appendix 5 of the Report.

The Ombudsman's Award

10. In 2007, a Complaint Manager of the CMS (along with 16 officers selected from over 60 government departments and public organisations) received The Ombudsman's Award for outstanding performance in complaint handling. This is the second consecutive year that staff of the CMS was given this important award which signifies recognition of the CMS's efforts, positive approach and robustness.

Initiatives to improve the HA's complaint management

11. As the CMS is responsible for the overall coordination of complaints in HA, the CMS has been working closely with the PCC to improve the HA's complaint handling. In 2007, the CMS has implemented 5 initiatives:

- a) Engaging patients and proactive collection of feedback
 - Established a Task Force (in December 2007) to develop a structured mechanism to launch the HA-wide Patient Satisfaction Survey
- b) Experience sharing with relevant complaint redress organisations
 - A seminar jointly organised by The Ombudsman's Office and the CMS for HA staff in July 2007
- c) Promotion of a learning culture on effective complaint management
 - Conducted specialist complaint management training for 1,176 front-line managers and staff
- d) Promotion of a learning & sharing culture for quality improvement
 - i) Sharing of best practices and complaint handling structure at hospital/cluster level
 - ii) Sharing of lessons learned from complaints with 7 hospital clusters
- e) Enhanced linkage between the complaints and quality/risk management systems
 - i) Developing a Electronic Patient Relations System to capture and codify complaint data for quality improvement
 - ii) Regular reporting of complaint data to the Central Committee on Quality & Risk Management