

**Issues relating to the provision of obstetric services in  
Tseung Kwan O Hospital**

Panel on Health Services, Legislative Council  
Meeting on Monday, 13 June 2011

Submission of Opinion  
by the **Hong Kong Neonatal Service Concern Group**

The Hong Kong Neonatal Service Concern Group consists of 32 senior clinicians and nurses working in the Departments of Paediatrics & Adolescent Medicine of HA (Hospital Authority) Hospitals – 6 Chiefs of Service, 4 Consultants, 8 Department Operations Managers, 5 Associate Consultants/Senior Medical Officers, 5 NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit) Nurse Specialists, 3 Ward Managers and 1 retired senior paediatric nurse. The members are listed in the Annex.

We have several concerns about the plan to open obstetric service in TKOH (Tseung Kwan O Hospital) in 2013-2014.

(1) There is a shortage of neonatal nurses in the coming few years.

Neonatal service is an integral part of perinatal service, especially to ensure prompt treatment of the babies in obstetrical emergencies. With the opening of the Labour and Delivery Ward in TKOH, NICU and SCBU (Special Care Baby Unit) must be opened at the same time.

In June 2008, we knew that “the Administration had planned to provide obstetric services in TKOH in 2013-2014 because it was estimated that by then the growth in childbirths in TKO should have reached the service provision benchmark of 3,000 per year. Such benchmark was adopted by HA since 1998 as a standard practice across different clusters to ensure the safety of expectant mothers and babies”. (LC Paper No. FC16/08-09).

Assuming that the TKOH neonatal service is supported by and networked with UCH (United Christian Hospital) for complicated diseases conditions and that only “low-risk” pregnancies (say 1.2% of

the babies needed NICU care vs 4% in the other 8 HA Hospitals) are managed there, there is still a need for at least 2 NICU beds and 16 SCBU beds in the initial phase of operation. A minimum of 5 neonatal nurses are needed at night shift. To work out a duty roster of 1 night shift per week, 40 extra nurses are needed.

A snapshot taken by our Group on April 7, 2011 on our neonatal manpower strength showed a deficit of 240 nurses. The replenishment by new recruits in September 2011 will not exceed 144 nurses. The next replenishment recruiting exercises will be in September 2012 and 2013. It is highly unlikely that the number of new recruits will cover the on-going wastage (to leave HA and to leave Paediatrics) as well as the opening of new beds in the existing NICU to cope with the increasing demand owing to the influx of Mainland mothers.

- (2) Even if the posts are filled, the expertise of these new recruits is another area of concern. It takes three years to train a neonatal nurse to handle a sick baby independently. A survey by our Group in December 2010 showed that only 46.9% of our neonatal nurses had completed HA-recognized subspecialty training in NICU. This percentage will go down with the dilution by the new recruits. Safety and quality of our medical care is always our top concern.
- (3) In addition to nursing shortage, there are also not enough doctors. The shortage will last up to 2015 before then there are only 250 graduates every year. This year we start to have resident posts in paediatrics not filled up.
- (4) If the commissioning of services in TKOH requires redeployment of experienced healthcare professionals from the existing neonatal units, it will no doubt affect the service quality there, adding also to the stress and frustration of the staff and triggering another wave of brain drain.
- (5) The skill mix and expertise of the healthcare professionals of a neonatal unit hinge on the number of babies handled. Annual newborn delivery of less than 3,000 will prolong the learning curves of the newly joined nurses. Even for the experienced, there will be a significant risk of deskilling with infrequent practice.

We understand that Tseung Kwan O is a rapidly developing area with many young families. Obstetric service in the area will be genuinely needed. Safe and quality perinatal service depends on a stable workforce of experienced healthcare professionals, and a reasonable workload to sustain expertise. We suggest delaying the opening of the obstetrical and neonatal service, until we have a more realistic manpower planning; and until we have a more certain service provision policy so that we could have a more accurate projection of the number of babies born in TKOH. The total number of babies born to mothers living in the catchment area of UCH and TKOH is unlikely to be more than 6,000 annually before 2015. On the other hand, the 5,634 babies (41% babies of Mainland mothers included) born in UCH in the financial year of 2010-2011 were receiving quality perinatal service, despite the severe manpower shortage.

To provide obstetrical and neonatal services in TKOH in the near future, HA must formulate and expedite a viable manpower and specialty training plan. Only with this could we ensure the safety and quality of the neonatal service in TKOH and the other birthing hospitals.

Dr. Chan Hin Biu  
Spokesman of the Hong Kong Neonatal Service Concern Group

3 June 2011

**Hong Kong Neonatal Service Concern Group**

	Member's Name	Hospital	Rank
1	<b>Dr CHAN Hin Bui</b>	United Christian Hospital (UCH)	Chief of Service
2	<b>Ms CHAN Kam Ming</b>	United Christian Hospital (UCH)	Nursing Specialist (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit)
3	<b>Ms Pamela CHAN</b>	Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH)	Department Operations Manager
4	<b>Ms Vivian CHANG</b>	Tuen Mun Hospital (TMH)	Ward Manager (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit)
5	<b>Ms Eva HO</b>	Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH)	Nursing Specialist (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit)
6	<b>Ms Angela KONG</b>	Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital (PYNEH)	Department Operations Manager (Retired)
7	<b>Dr KWAN Kwok Fan</b>	Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH)	Associate Consultant
8	<b>Dr LAM Yuen Yu</b>	Kwong Wah Hospital (KWH)	Consultant
9	<b>Dr LAW Chi Wai</b>	Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH)	Senior Medical Officer
10	<b>Ms LEE Suk Yin</b>	Prince of Wales Hospital (PWH)	Nursing Specialist (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit)
11	<b>Dr LEE Wai Hong</b>	Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH)	Chief of Service
12	<b>Dr LEE Wai Kin</b>	Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital (PYNEH)	Associate Consultant
13	<b>Ms Winnie LEE</b>	Tuen Mun Hospital (TMH)	Department Operations Manager
15	<b>Ms LEUNG Mui Chu</b>	Prince of Wales Hospital (PWH)	Department Operations Manager
17	<b>Ms LIONG Mei Tat</b>	Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH)	Ward Manager (Special Care Baby Unit)
14	<b>Ms Itea LEUNG</b>	Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH)	Ward Manager (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit)
16	<b>Dr LI Chi Kong</b>	Prince of Wales Hospital (PWH)	Chief of Service
18	<b>Ms Gloria LUK</b>	Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH)	Department Operations Manager
19	<b>Ms MA Po King</b>	United Christian Hospital (UCH)	Department Operations Manager
20	<b>Ms Alice MAN</b>	Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH)	Nursing Specialist (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit)
21	<b>Dr Daniel NG</b>	Kwong Wah Hospital (KWH)	Chief of Service
22	<b>Dr SHEK Chi Chiu</b>	Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH)	Consultant
23	<b>Dr SIU Kiu Lok</b>	Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH)	Associate Consultant
24	<b>Dr Sylvia SIU</b>	Tuen Mun Hospital (TMH)	Associate Consultant
25	<b>Dr SO Lok Yee</b>	Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital (PYNEH)	Chief of Service
26	<b>Dr Niko TSE</b>	Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH)	Chief of Service
27	<b>Ms Connie WAN</b>	Queen Mary Hospital (QMH)	Department Operations Manager
28	<b>Dr WONG Kar Yin</b>	Queen Mary Hospital (QMH)	Consultant
29	<b>Dr William WONG</b>	Prince of Wales Hospital (PWH)	Consultant
30	<b>Ms May YEUNG</b>	Queen Mary Hospital (QMH)	Nursing Specialist (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit)
31	<b>Ms YU Wan Lan</b>	Kwong Wah Hospital (KWH)	Department Operations Manager
32	<b>Ms Alice YUEN</b>	Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital (PYNEH)	Deputizing Department Operations Manager