

Audit Report # 31
Dental services provided by the Department of Health

BACKGROUND

Audit Commission conducted an audit from May to August 1998 on the dental services provided by the Department of Health. The observations and recommendations of the review were published in Audit Report No. 31 and presented to the Legislative Council on 18 November 1998.

2. The purpose of the audit was to examine the economy and effectiveness in the implementation of the oral health policy and the cost-effectiveness of the provision of dental services for civil servants.

AUDIT REPORT'S RECOMMENDATIONS

3. On the *provision of oral health services for the public*, Audit Commission concluded that there was scope for improvement in the :

- a) setting of oral health goals;
- b) conduct of oral health surveys;
- c) promotion of oral health in the community; and
- d) planning of dental manpower to meet public demand.

4. On the *provision of dental services for civil servants and their dependants*, the Commission concluded that there was a need to

- a) monitor the implementation and evaluate the cost-effectiveness of current measures to improve service quality;
- b) explore the scope for making use of the service of dentists in the private sector; and

- c) enhance the deployment of appropriate auxiliary dental personnel to provide different dental services in order to ensure a more cost-effective use of manpower resources.

DEVELOPMENTS TO DATE

Provision of oral health services for the public

- 5. On provision of oral health services for the public :
 - a) the Working Group on Revision of Oral Health Goals commissioned by the Dental Subcommittee (DSC) under the Health and Medical Development Advisory Committee will present its report at the DSC's next meeting in February 1999:
 - b) a paper on co-ordination of oral surveillance in Hong Kong will also be presented at this meeting to address the issue of conducting oral health surveys in the future;
 - c) the recommendations made with respect to promotion of oral health in the community have been included in the implementation plans of future oral health promotion activities; and
 - d) the DSC has recognized the need to closely monitor the supply and demand of dentists in Hong Kong.

Provision of dental services for civil servants and their dependants

- 6. On provision of dental services for civil servants and their dependants:
 - a) the Department is continuing the monitoring and evaluation of the cost-effectiveness of current measures to improve service quality, which included the Extended Operating Hours (EOH) and the recommendations in the consultancy report on service quality improvement. The waiting time for dental appointment has been steadily shortened from 7.73 months before the start of the EOH scheme to 5.79 months in October 1998, which was a 1.94 months reduction. The recommendations made in the service

quality improvement consultancy have been implemented on a trial basis and significant improvements on the attendance rate have been observed. The initiatives will be implemented in phases to all dental clinics.

- b) on the aspect of exploring the scope for making use of the service of dentists in the private sector, the Administration will have to take into account the cost of utilizing private sector service, the practicability of defining clearly the types of service to be provided by private dentists, the cost of administering, monitoring and regulating any scheme for private sector participation and the quality of service. Furthermore, updated cost comparisons, based on the Hong Kong Dental Association's 1997 Fee Survey and the Government Dental Service's 1996/97 costing exercise, indicated that the cost of the latter compared favourably with that of the private sector (Appendix).
- c) on the recommendation of enhancing the deployment of appropriate auxiliary dental personnel to provide different dental services in order to ensure a more cost-effective use of manpower resources, the Department is still at the stage of gathering more information to facilitate its consideration of how best to take this recommendation forward.

Department of Health
January 1999

**Cost comparisons of specific dental treatment
Government dental service* and private sector@**

Dental treatment	Unit Cost government dental service	Mean charge private sector
Scaling & polishing	\$299	\$366
Simple amalgam filling	\$419	\$303 - 403
Simple extraction	\$299	\$394

* based on 1996/97 costing exercise of Government dental service

@ based on “first ever comprehensive fee survey on General Dental Practice by an independent private firm” commissioned in 1997 by Hong Kong Dental Association’s Committee on Marketing of Dentistry