

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1525/99-00
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/HS

LegCo Panel on Health Services

Minutes of meeting
held on Tuesday, 29 February 2000 at 8:30 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members Present : Hon Michael HO Mun-ka (Chairman)
Dr Hon LEONG Che-hung, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon HO Sai-chu, JP
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon LEE Kai-ming, SBS, JP
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Hon Bernard CHAN
Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP
Dr Hon TANG Siu-tong, JP

Members Absent : Hon LEE Wing-tat
Hon CHAN Yuen-han
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, JP
Hon WONG Yung-kan
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung

Public Officers Attending : All items

Mr Gregory LEUNG, JP
Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare

Miss Angela LUK
Principal Assistant Secretary for Health and Welfare

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Ms Jennifer CHAN
Principal Assistant Secretary for Health and Welfare

Mr William TSUI
Assistant Secretary for Health and Welfare

Dr S P MAK
Acting Deputy Director of Health

Dr Lawrence LAI
Deputy Director (Corporate Affairs), Hospital Authority

Dr Beatrice CHENG
Executive Manager (Professional Services), Hospital Authority

Clerk in Attendance : Ms Doris CHAN
Chief Assistant Secretary (2) 4

Staff in Attendance : Item II only

Ms Eva LIU
Head, Research & Library Services Division

Mr Jackie WU
Research Officer 1

Miss Elyssa WONG
Research Officer 4

All items

Ms Joanne MAK
Senior Assistant Secretary (2) 4

I. Proposed visit to the Guangzhou University of Traditional Chinese Medicine
(LC Paper No. CB(2) 1221/99-00)

The Chairman referred to LC Paper No. CB(2)1221/99-00(01) circulated earlier

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to members for their information and asked the Clerk to make a brief report on the matter. The Clerk said that Assistant Director (Traditional Chinese Medicine) of the Department of Health (DH), who had previously arranged the visit for the Bills Committee on the Chinese Medicine Bill, informed her a few days ago that he was unable to arrange the visit in view of the Administration's response to a request made by the Security Panel to visit authorities on the Mainland in August 1999. However, he had provided information of the contact person so that the Panel could approach the University direct if members still wished to pursue the visit. The Chairman said that the Panel could either write direct to the University or seek the assistance of the Health and Welfare Bureau (HWB). He sought members' views on the way forward.

2. Dr LEONG Che-hung said that as the proposed visit was very worthwhile, he hoped that the Administration would assist in the arrangements. In response to the Chairman question as to whether HWB could assist, Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare (DSHW) said that it could assist by providing the relevant information such as the name of the contact person to the Panel. As regards actual arrangement, if the visit was to be made under the Panel's name, it was more appropriate for the Panel to write to the Guangzhou University direct.

3. In view of the Administration's response and advice, the Chairman proposed and members agreed that the Panel would write to the Guangzhou University regarding the proposed visit.

Clerk

II. Proposed research study on the regulation of health food

4. In response to Dr LEONG Che-hung's question about the Administration's plan for regulating health food products, DSHW said that the Administration would soon set up an internal working group to look at the issue from various perspectives. The Chairman requested the Administration to provide any relevant information it had on the subject to the Research and Library Services Division of the Secretariat to facilitate the research work. DSHW agreed to liaise with the Head (Research and Library) regarding the matter.

Adm

5. Mr Fred LI Wah-ming suggested that the research should make reference to the experience of overseas countries in their control of functional food products. In view of the growing popularity in the use of aroma for relaxation purpose, he suggested that the research should also look at the effect of this kind of health product. Dr LEONG Che-hung suggested that the research should examine various kinds of health-enhancing equipment. However, the Chairman considered that in order not to over-extend the scope of the research study, it should concentrate on health food products first. Members agreed.

III. List of follow-up actions by the Administration

(LC Paper No. CB(2)1224/99-00(01))

Subsidiary legislation under the Chiropractors Registration Ordinance

6. Members noted that the final English draft of the subsidiary legislation had been circulated for the agreement of the Chiropractors Council, which was scheduled to meet in April 2000.

7. In reply to the Chairman's question on the reason for the long delay, DSHW said that the preparation of the subsidiary legislation had been held up because of the difficulty in setting the amount of registration fee to be charged. He explained that because of the small number of members involved, the fee would be quite substantial as it should be calculated on a cost recovery basis. Mr LAW Chi-kwong opined that the government should consider subsidizing part of the cost in such cases. DSHW believed that the final proposal on the registration fee, estimated to be several thousand dollars, would be acceptable to the chiropractors.

Mental Health Services

Findings of a longitudinal study

8. Deputy Director (Corporate Affairs) (DD(CA)) of the Hospital Authority (HA) briefed members on the findings of a longitudinal study conducted by HA psychiatric clinicians from 1996 to 1998. He pointed out that there was a 21% increase in the number of psychiatric inpatient admissions and a 4% decrease in the total number of new outpatient cases from 1997 to 1998. Among the total number of inpatient cases, the proportion of schizophrenia had dropped by 2% whereas a corresponding increase had been found in the proportion of affective disorders.

9. DD(CA) said that the increase in inpatient number could be due to general population increase, greater awareness of psychiatric treatment and greater willingness to receive psychiatric treatment.

Rationalization of psychiatric services

10. DD(CA) said that following a review of the future planning for inpatient psychiatric facilities, HA had projected that with improved medication, early rehabilitation and development of community psychiatric services, and more effective psychiatric treatment in controlling mental illness, the future requirement for psychiatric beds would be reduced. HA therefore aimed to reduce the total number of psychiatric beds from 5,000 to around 4,500 by 2004/05. This would enable the shift of resources from inpatient beds to enhance community psychiatric services.

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11. Mr LAW Chi-kwong expressed support for the shift of resources from inpatient beds to development of community psychiatric services. He suggested that HWB should review the provision of post-discharge rehabilitation and community psychiatric services and the re-admission rate of discharged mental patients. He further suggested that the Administration should take into account the increasing problem of affective disorder in its design of mental health education. DSHW said that HWB would examine the work to be taken over by the social welfare side.

12. In response to the Chairman's question, DSHW said that with the reduction of 500 psychiatric beds, there would be a corresponding increase in community services to assist the discharged patients, such as long-stay care home places.

13. The Chairman was concerned whether HA, with the reduction of 500 psychiatric beds in the next few years, would strengthen its other services (such as the outpatient services) and provide more community psychiatric nurses. He considered that in the future the Panel should further discuss the changes in the modes of psychiatric services of HA and the provision of rehabilitation and community psychiatric services for discharged mental patients. In this connection, he said that it might be necessary to hold a joint-meeting with the Welfare Services Panel. He suggested to add this item to the "List of issues to be considered by the Panel".

Clerk

Monitoring of private hospitals

14. DSHW said that DH was reviewing the legislation for the licensing of private hospitals with a view to enhancing their service quality. The review would be completed by the end of this year. In addition, he pointed out that the private hospitals were exploring to put in place an accreditation scheme for themselves. In response to the Chairman's comment that there seemed to be very little progress since the matter was last discussed by the Panel in April 1999, DSHW said that the Green Paper on health care reform would also include the future direction for the monitoring of private hospitals.

15. Dr LEONG Che-hung took the view that the service standards stipulated by DH and the proposed accreditation system for private hospitals and by HA for public hospitals should be broadly the same. He further suggested HA hospitals to participate in the accreditation scheme. In response, DSHW agreed to explore means of ensuring application of the same level of service standards to all hospitals.

Adm

Visiting Health Teams (VHTs) and Community Geriatric Assessments Teams (CGATs) for the elderly

16. The Chairman pointed out that when the subject was last discussed in April 1999, the Administration had agreed to conduct a review of the VHT and CGAT services. He expressed disappointment that no action had been taken.

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17. DSHW explained that VHTs and CGATs actually provided different services, with the former concentrating on providing preventive health care and the latter on health assessment and secondary care. Mr LAW Chi-kwong considered that it would be more cost-effective if the two teams were amalgamated. In response, DSHW said that the operation of the two outreach teams would be reviewed in the wider context of a community care review.

Adm

Dental policy and review of oral health goals

18. Members noted that the dental policy and the future role of the Government in the provision of dental services would be addressed in the Green Paper on health care reform.

Adm

Monitoring of sale of drugs

19. In response to the Chairman's enquiry about the progress of amending the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance, DSHW said that the Administration planned to split the Ordinance into two. One would regulate pharmacists while the other would regulate pharmaceuticals and the related industry. The drafting of the legislative amendments was in progress. However, it was unlikely that the proposed amendments would be introduced to the Council within the current session.

20. At the request of Dr LEONG Che-hung, Acting Deputy Director of Health (Atg DD(H)) agreed to provide details of the three cases involving sale of illegal drugs mentioned in the paper and the amounts of fines imposed.

Adm

Implementation of the Enhanced Productivity Programme (EPP) in HA and DH

21. DD(CA) said that HA would seek to achieve savings by means of streamlining procedures, improving system of work and rationalization of services. Atg DD(H) referred to the information paper on the subject submitted to the Panel in November 1999 which had set out the initiatives taken by DH to achieve savings as required by EPP. These initiatives included increasing the numbers of consultations, streamlining administrative procedures and so on.

22. The Chairman asked through what channels the public could learn about the measures taken by HA and DH to meet the targets of EPP. DD(CA) replied that the Annual Plan and Report of HA provided information on the targets of the HA services. He agreed to consider highlighting in the Report which of the initiatives introduced were for the purpose of meeting the EPP target. Atg DD(H) pointed out that she would also consider ways to publicize the measures taken by DH in implementing the productivity initiatives.

HA

Adm

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Proposed amendments to the Radiation (Control of Irradiating Apparatus) Regulations

- Adm 23. Members noted that further to the Panel meeting on 13 December 1999, the Radiation Board had written to the Hong Kong College of Radiologists to seek its views on the proposed amendments. Reply from the College was awaited.

Optometrists' role in Hong Kong's health care system

- Adm 24. Members noted that the Clerk had written to HWB on 25 February 2000 seeking its response to the submissions from the optometry profession. DSHW agreed to reply as soon as possible.

Control of unregistered pharmaceutical products

25. DSHW informed members that the Pharmacy and Poisons Board had recently met to further discuss new measures for tightening the import control on these products. Barring any unforeseen circumstances, the new measures would be implemented in January 2001.

Ancillary Dental Personnel (Dental Hygienist) (Amendment) Regulation

26. DSHW said that HWB had recently discussed with the Hong Kong Dental Association (HKDA) which had agreed to provide a more detailed submission to HWB for their follow-up.

27. Members agreed to go over the outstanding issues again at the end of the current session.

IV. Issues discussed by the Health and Medical Development Advisory Committee (HMDAC)
(LC Paper No. CB(2)1072/99-00(01))

28. Referring to paragraph 4 of the Administration's paper, Dr LEONG Che-hung requested the Administration to explain its onward plan to upgrade basic nursing education to university level. DSHW replied that the Administration had been working towards this goal. In view of the large number of nurses required each year, he considered that the policy should be implemented on a gradual basis. He pointed out that only about 200 nursing degree places were available at the local universities each year, which fell far short of the annual demands for nurses. In response to the Chairman's question, DSHW said that after further studies on the manpower situation of nurses for the next few years, HWB would forward its study results to the Education and Manpower Bureau.

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29. Dr LEONG Che-hung asked if it was the Administration's long-term target that all nurses would be university graduates and the training of nurses by apprenticeship would cease. He also asked whether HA, in suspending the nurses schools, had taken into consideration the fact that many hospitals were still facing shortages of nurses. In response to Dr LEONG's first question, DSHW said that the answer was in the affirmative but he could not set a timeframe for achieving that goal at this stage as it would be subject to the availability of resources of the universities as well. He further said that HA had made the decision of suspending the nurses schools based on its assessment of the demand and supply of nurses as well as their wastage rate.

30. The Chairman recalled that some years ago HWB had requested universities to provide blister programme to train up more social work graduates to meet anticipated shortages of social workers. He considered that the current approach taken by HWB was very different. He felt that the Administration had not shown a determination to upgrade the nurses training to university level as seen from the fact that it still retained the nurses schools. He considered that the Administration's policy was unclear in this regard. However, DSHW explained that it was a more pragmatic approach to deal with the issue as by retaining the nurses schools, it might help cope with any unanticipated serious shortages of nurses. As all the nurses schools had already been suspended, he considered that the policy of upgrading nursing education was actually quite clear.

31. In response to Dr TANG Siu-tong's question, DSHW said that the Administration had not set a target of achieving a particular percentage of nurses who were university graduates by a certain year.

Adm 32. In reply to Dr LEONG Che-hung's question, DSHW said that HMDAC had discussed the manpower situation of doctors in early 1999. He agreed to provide the relevant information to the Panel for reference.

33. The meeting ended at 10:25 am.

Legislative Council Secretariat
29 March 2000