

For discussion
on 10.4. 2000

LegCo Panel on Health Services

The Complaint Handling Mechanism of the Hospital Authority

Introduction

This paper informs members of the complaint handling mechanism of the Hospital Authority (HA).

Complaint handling mechanism

2. HA operates a two-tier complaint management system to investigate and handle complaints lodged by patients and members of the public. Aggrieved parties may file complaints direct with individual hospitals or the HA Head Office (HAHO). If a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation conducted by the hospital/HAHO, he/she may appeal to the Public Complaints Committee (PCC). The PCC comprises HA Board members who are not executives of the HA management, and members of the community. The terms of reference of the PCC is at Annex. The time frame for the PCC to consider and decide on a complaint case is normally three months. The decision of the PCC is final within HA.

3. HA hospitals have established guidelines in handling complaints. All hospitals, clinics and institutions are required to designate a senior nurse as a Patient Relations Officer to receive verbal or written complaints. All complaints will be investigated by senior hospital staff or the Hospital Chief Executive, as appropriate, and be decided upon within three weeks.

4. Complainants not satisfied with the response of the hospital to which they have initially filed their complaints may appeal to the PCC. Upon receipt of a complaint, the PCC will independently investigate the case, and if necessary, commission experts to investigate and give professional advice on the complaint. To facilitate the investigation

work, PCC convenes “duty member sessions” whereby PCC members would meet with complainants and those being complained in person, and mediate and resolve complaints where appropriate.

5. Apart from handling appeal cases, the PCC is also mandated to look into complaint cases referred to it by other channels of complaint, including the Government, the Ombudsman and Legislative Councillors. Upon receipt of such cases, the PCC would decide on whether the complaints should first be referred to hospitals/HAHO for investigation before deciding upon the complaint, or be taken up by the PCC for investigation and decision.

6. The two-tier complaint management system provides an efficient and effective system for handling complaints. The HA encourages complaint cases to be first handled by the hospital concerned, with the PCC mainly concentrating on appeal cases. This is because the subject matter of most complaints mainly relates to the administration and operations in individual hospitals which can be resolved expeditiously at the operational level. The system has been working well. In 1999, of the 1 705 complaint cases directed at HA hospitals and personnel, 1 607 were resolved satisfactorily at the hospital or HAHO level, and only 59 cases were the subject of appeal. Apart from the 59 appeal cases, the PCC handled 26 and 13 cases referred by Legislative Councillors and other channels of complaint respectively in 1999.

Health and Welfare Bureau

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