

For discussion
on 10.1.2000

**LegCo Panel on Health Services
Meeting to be held on 10 January 2000**

Patient referral by optometrists to Hospital Authority clinics

Purpose

This paper informs Members of the views of the Hospital Authority (HA) on the proposal of HA specialist clinics accepting patient referral from optometrists.

Background

2. Different professional bodies/academics have been urging HA to review its current policy of only accepting patient referrals from general practitioners or ophthalmologists, but not from optometrists. They consider that optometrists with formal education and training are capable of providing primary eye care services to patients and a referral system should be in place for optometrists to refer patients to the specialist outpatient clinics/hospitals under HA.

HA's Response

3. HA points out that optometrists are not trained to diagnose or treat diseases other than visual or refractive conditions. Patients ostensibly complain about visual disturbances may be suffering from a whole range of ophthalmic diseases and other systemic diseases with ophthalmic manifestations. Unlike medical practitioners who are trained to provide holistic care to patients, optometrists may not be able to make the proper diagnosis. It would not be appropriate for optometrists to take on the role of providing primary eye care services and make patient referrals to HA specialist clinics.

4. Under the present system, primary health care practitioners and Accident and Emergency physicians are responsible for assuming the gatekeeper role in managing patients with eye diseases. Since eye diseases could be part and partial of other health problems, medical practitioners in the primary care setting are responsible for initiating appropriate treatment or referring patients to be further attended by specialists or other allied health professionals for specialized care as and when needed. Optometrists are important partners to the medical practitioners and ophthalmologists in attending to the needs of patients with visual or refractive disorders.

Conclusion

5. Members are invited to note the views expressed in paragraphs 3 and 4, in view of which, we do not propose to take the matter forward.

Health and Welfare Bureau
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