

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)2161/05-06
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/HS

Panel on Health Services

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Friday, 31 March 2006 at 3:00 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Dr Hon KWOK Ka-ki (Chairman)
Dr Hon Joseph LEE Kok-long (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-yee, GBS, JP
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, SBS, JP
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
Hon Vincent FANG Kang, JP
Hon LI Kwok-ying, MH
- Members absent** : Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP
Hon Bernard CHAN, JP
- Member attending** : Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
- Public Officers attending** : Item I
Mr Jeff LEUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
(Health)

Dr T H LEUNG, JP
Deputy Director of Health

Dr HAU Kong-lung
Consultant Forensic Pathologist-in-charge
Department of Health

Clerk in attendance : Ms Doris CHAN
Chief Council Secretary (2) 4

Staff in attendance : Ms Maisie LAM
Council Secretary (2) 2

I. Fu Shan Public Mortuary Incident
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1568/05-06(01) to (02))

At the invitation of the Chairman, Deputy Director of Health (DDH) and Consultant Forensic Pathologist-in-charge (Consultant i/c) gave a PowerPoint presentation on the Administration's paper, which set out the findings and recommendations of the report of the Independent Committee on the incident of the Fu Shan Public Mortuary (the Committee), as well as the immediate measures taken by the Department of Health (DH) to prevent recurrence of similar incidents. DDH also made apologies to the two affected families.

Issues raised by members

2. Mr Andrew CHENG expressed support for the recommendations of the Committee to improve the operation of public mortuaries, but was concerned about the course of actions to be taken by the Administration to implement the recommendations. He then made the following enquiries -

- (a) how the Administration could assure the public that the public mortuary staff would improve their attitude and treat the dead bodies with respect, pending the introduction of a trained and professional cadre of mortuary staff in the long run; and
- (b) whether the allocation of additional resources for the implementation of the improvement measures would lead to an increase in the fees and charges for services provided by public mortuaries.

3. DDH responded as follows -

- (a) subsequent to the incident, DH had immediately held a seminar to brief all mortuary staff again on the working procedures. Further training in this regard would soon commence. To avoid frequent rushing in and out of Mortuary Attendants between the lobby and the infection control areas, clerical posts had been created to handle duties at registration counters and the staff would report duty in the following week. In the long run, a professional grade to undertake the management and daily operation of public mortuaries would be established so as to attract talents and promote professionalism for mortuary service; and
- (b) the services provided by public mortuaries were free of charge at present. Should there be any change in this regard, the Administration would consult the Legislative Council first.

4. Mr WONG Kwok-hing pointed out that the Fu Shan Public Mortuary incident had occurred despite the Administration's undertaking to improve the operation of public mortuaries during the discussion of the Panel on mishandling of bodies in the mortuaries in July 2005. He considered that there was mismanagement of the public mortuaries, as demonstrated by the fact that it was not until the occurrence of the incident that the management realised the malfunction of the close-circuit television (CCTV) in the Fu Shan Public Mortuary, as detailed in paragraph 3.23 of the report of the Committee. In the light of this, he sought clarification from the Administration whether there would be any disciplinary action against the management who had committed dereliction of duty in monitoring the operation of the CCTV surveillance system. Mr WONG also asked why the Mortuary Attendants concerned could remain in office without any immediate actions being taken against them after the incident.

5. DDH replied that a clear set of operational guidelines had been in place and DH had immediately reminded the medical staff to step up supervision and monitoring of compliance with the established working procedures right after the incident. To this end, a pressing task as recommended by the Committee was to enhance internal audit, such as arranging frequent surprise checks by the Internal Audit Team, and monitoring the operation in public mortuaries through the CCTV surveillance system. Regarding the two Mortuary Attendants involved in the incident, DDH said that they were now on leave and would be redeployed to other duties outside mortuaries upon their return from leave. In order not to compromise the police investigation, the disciplinary hearing would be conducted after police investigation. He added that in accordance with the Public Service

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(Administration) Order, an officer interdicted for the purpose of disciplinary proceedings would receive full pay. An officer on interdiction would receive half pay if he was charged under the Order for a misconduct which might lead to his removal from office or if a criminal proceeding was instituted against him.

6. In further response to Mr WONG Kwok-hing, Consultant i/c said that the installation of CCTV surveillance system in public mortuaries in January 2006 was a new measure to ensure security and proper handling of bodies. The system could only be accessed by the grade of Mortuary Officer or above and the Head of the Division would determine the frequency of examination. To his knowledge, the records of the CCTV surveillance system of the Kwai Chung Public Mortuary and Victoria Public Mortuary were checked on a weekly basis. He assured members that the frequency of examination had been increased after the incident.

7. DDH supplemented that in line with the recommendations of the Committee, the Forensic Pathologist/Medical Technologist/Mortuary Officer of each Division would now conduct daily checking to ascertain that the CCTV surveillance system was running properly. Besides, the Forensic Pathologist or the Medical Technologist, as the case may be, was required to review the video clips on a weekly basis.

8. Mr WONG Kwok-hing reiterated that the management should be held responsible for failing to monitor the operation of the CCTV surveillance system in the Fu Shan Public Mortuary.

9. Ms LI Fung-ying asked whether the employees' right and need of taking leave had been attended to, as the Committee had recommended that the duty roster of staff should be reviewed to ensure that staff arrangements would meet the demand in different time periods while attending to the above issues. She pointed out that during the period of 1 pm to 5 pm from Monday to Friday, there were only two Mortuary Attendants on duty to receive and handle the claiming of bodies of the deceased. The situation was even worse for the period from 5 pm to 9 am the following morning and in Saturday afternoon when only one Mortuary Attendant was on duty with no support or supervision. Ms LI stressed that additional manpower would be required for implementing the measures recommended by the Committee to improve the operation of public mortuaries. The Chairman echoed similar views.

10. DDH explained that the planning of the duty roster had taken the workload of different time periods into account. In the light of the wide range of services provided by public mortuaries during the period from 9 am to 1 pm, which included autopsy, receiving and the handling of identification and claiming of the bodies of the deceased, more staff were deployed for this time period. With

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regards to the period from 5 pm to 9 am the following morning, the main responsibility of the Mortuary Attendant on duty was to receive bodies of those whose cause of death had to be ascertained, such as sudden deaths and deaths caused by accident, murder and suicide. In such cases, the Mortuary Attendant would not be working on his own because the public officer or the police officer in charge of the case would provide support in this respect.

11. Ms LI Fung-ying said that judging from the information provided by the Administration so far, she maintained the view that there was a lack of adequate manpower for the periods of 1 pm to 5 pm from Monday to Saturday and 5 pm to 9 am the following morning. She hoped that measures would be taken to address the problem because sufficient staff was the key to ensure the quality of services provided by public mortuaries.

12. DDH replied that apart from the Mortuary Attendants, one Mortuary Officer, one Mortuary Technician and some Forensic Pathologists were also on duty during the period from 9 am to 5 pm. Besides, as mentioned in paragraph 3 above, additional manpower had been deployed to public mortuaries immediately after the incident to handle clerical duties at registration counters.

13. Dr YEUNG Sum asked the following questions -

- (a) whether the bereavement counselling service recommended under the short-term improvement measures was to be provided by the existing mortuary staff; and
- (b) whether the Administration had a concrete work plan to take forward the recommendation to strive for professionalism, such as reviewing the staff establishment, salary and structure of training, etc so as to attract the talents to join the profession.

14. DDH said that voluntary organisations would be invited to provide the bereavement counselling service to families of the deceased. In the meantime, the Administration was working with two voluntary organisations on the details. He pointed out that social workers of these organisations would have the knowledge in providing assistance to the families in handling emotional stress and social problems arising from the loss of their beloved ones. DDH further said that the Administration would shortly discuss its work plan to establish a trained and professional cadre of mortuary staff. More information on overseas experience would be obtained for reference.

15. The Chairman welcomed the measures recommended by the Committee to improve the mortuary service. However, given that the new measures intended

to address last year's problem of mishandling of bodies, such as monitoring the operation of public mortuaries through the CCTV surveillance system, had yet to be properly implemented, he wondered whether the recommendations could be carried out effectively, given the deep-rooted work culture of public mortuary staff. The Chairman said that the Administration should consider reviewing the existing organisational structure of public mortuaries where the Forensic Pathologists, whose expertise was in forensic pathology and clinical forensic medicine, were also tasked with the responsibility to monitor the operation of mortuaries. Apart from changing the work culture, he suggested that some of the services provided by public mortuaries could be outsourced.

16. DDH responded that the Administration attached great importance to enhancing the quality of services of public mortuaries. On the management of mortuaries, DDH said that the Mortuary Officer of each Division would provide support to Forensic Pathologists in this regard. He assured members that the Administration would enhance staff training with a view to raising the quality of mortuary services.

17. Consultant i/c supplemented that measures had been taken to strengthen middle management. After the last year's media report on the capacity of public mortuaries and the related issues, the operation guidelines for public mortuary staff had been refined to provide details in respect of proper handling of bodies. The need for orderly and dignified handling of bodies was re-emphasised. Staff of mortuaries were reminded to be considerate towards family members of the deceased. Communications between the management and frontline staff had also been strengthened and experience sharing sessions and workshops were organised with a view to altering the traditional work culture of public mortuary staff.

18. DDH referred members to paragraph 4.2 of the report of the Committee, which set out the difficulties encountered by the Administration in implementing its plan of building and expanding public mortuaries. He pointed out that with the opening of the new Kwai Chung Public Mortuary in the fourth quarter of 2005, the problem of insufficient refrigerating capacity could be relieved for the next few years. However, he envisaged that the existing capacity could hardly cope with the future needs of increasing ageing population.

19. The Chairman shared the Administration's view that since death was a taboo in the culture of our society, it would be difficult to find locations to build new public mortuaries to meet the growing demand for storage space. He said that the Panel could discuss the issue where necessary. The Chairman also reiterated that outsourcing some of the services provided by public mortuaries should merit further consideration. He further asked whether the Administration would consider inviting overseas experts, such as those of the Victorian Institute

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of Forensic Medicine, to discuss how to take forward the recommendation of the Committee on the introduction of professional mortuary service.

20. Consultant i/c responded in positive and he said that the Administration would actively examine the merits of the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine. He added that the development of professionalism required prolonged training and public education, as well as the allocation of additional resources.

Admin 21. In response to Mr WONG Kwok-hing, Consultant i/c said that the Head of Division concerned and himself should ultimately be held responsible for failing to monitor the operation of the CCTV surveillance system of the Fu Shan Public Mortuary and they had learnt a lesson from the incident. At the request of the Chairman, DDH undertook to provide a paper after the meeting setting out the disciplinary actions taken by the Administration, if any, against the frontline and management staff who had committed dereliction of duty in this incident.

Admin 22. In concluding the discussion, the Chairman requested the Administration to inform the Panel in three to six months' time of the progress in taking forward the medium and long-term measures recommended by the Committee. Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Health) (PASHWF(H)) said that a working group would be set up under the steer of the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau to consider the progress report of DH in this regard.

23. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:15 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
26 May 2006