

Submission to

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Legislative Council, Hong Kong SAR

Panel on Health Services

Meeting on 10 April 2006

**Work pressure of frontline health care workers
in public hospitals**

Manpower loss and brain drain in public health service

About seven percent of public doctors left the service last year.

The Hospital Authority management maintained that the shortfall could be filled by recruiting new medical graduates. Senior public doctors are worried that there will be a service gap and there will be degradation of service quality. The knowledge and skills carried by the leaving experienced doctors cannot be replaced by the new graduates. It often takes nine years or more to train a specialist with adequate basic experience. The brain drain will jeopardize service delivery and quality.

The reasons why the experienced doctors are leaving service

The limited resources provided by the Government have affected the provision of public health services. Introduction of useful new drugs, diagnostic and therapeutic equipment are delayed. The experienced doctors are not able to do what a health professional should do for their patients. With the continuous brain drain, senior doctors have to take up overloaded duties and extra responsibilities of the departed experienced doctors.

Public doctors have learned to work under high pressure.

However, the heightened public expectation, long working hours, heavy workload and abrasion of professional autonomy are factors affecting the morale of public doctors. The lack of support from the management and the lack of understanding from the public create even more frustrations. The public complaint mechanism has been accused by medical staff for unfair bias towards patients and their relatives. The working conditions of doctors are considered to be deteriorating.

Erosion of medical professionalism

Hong Kong has been able to provide an excellent public health service at a relatively small public cost as compared to other developed countries. The achievement is proven by many facts and analyses and is highly praised by health experts from the rest of the world. The good health service is highly regarded by the public. The high quality service is achieved by the high professional standards of public doctors. The public doctors are used to heavy workload for long working hours for the benefit of the patients. The loss of mutual trust between the administration and front line public doctors create much misunderstanding and conflicts. Junior doctors would question whether they should continue to work for long hours with an uncertain job prospect and professional development. Erosion of medical professionalism would eventually affect the health and well-being of the public.

The following recommendations are made:

1. Shorten the working hours and relieve the workload of frontline doctors.
2. Provide secure job prospects and training opportunities for the junior doctors.
3. Provide adequate promotion opportunities for good medical staff.
4. Improve the working conditions and environment of frontline doctors.
5. The Government, the Hospital Authority and the medical profession should try to maintain and improve medical professionalism.
6. The Public, the Government and the Hospital Authority should show support to our public doctors who have devoted their lives to serve Hong Kong.

(signed)

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