

Our ref: FH/H/1/5 Pt.91

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16 May 2008

Ms Mary So
Clerk to Panel
Panel on Health Services
Legislative Council
8 Jackson Road
Central

Dear Ms So,

Shortage of medical staff in the Hospital Authority

I refer to item 2 on the list of follow-up actions in LC Paper No. CB(2)1527/07-08(02). At the meeting of the Panel on Health Services held on 9 July 2007, the Administration was requested to provide information on -

- (a) its projected manpower demand for different healthcare professionals in Hong Kong in the coming years and the number of places in medical and nursing programmes funded by the Government that would be provided to meet such manpower demand;
- (b) the methodology used by the Hospital Authority (HA) in deploying nurses;
- (c) the methodology for estimating long-term manpower demand of HA;
- (d) ways to improve the management culture of HA to avoid situations, such as only informing contract doctors close to the expiry of their contract whether their contract would be renewed and giving unequal pay for the same work; and
- (e) future supply of medical and nursing graduates to avoid any shortfall or oversupply of doctors and nurses.

HA was also requested to provide a report on the progress made in addressing pay disparity amongst its healthcare staff. The Administration and HA's response to the above items are set out below.

Response to (a) and (e)

The Government makes projections on long-term healthcare manpower demand from time to time. In the process, we would take into account the views of major employers of healthcare professions, such as the Hospital Authority (HA), the Department of Health, the Social Welfare Department and private hospitals. We will continue to monitor closely the healthcare manpower requirements.

At present, a number of University Grants Committee(UGC)-funded tertiary institutions are providing medical and nursing undergraduate programmes. Besides, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and HA are also offering publicly funded higher diploma nursing programmes and training programmes for enrolled nurses. The graduates of these programmes are also eligible for registration as registered nurses or enrolled nurses. The Administration gives advice to UGC in relation to UGC-funded places of healthcare programmes, which will serve as reference for institutions in formulating their academic plans. A table showing the number of UGC funded and publicly funded places of medical and nursing undergraduate programmes in 2008-09 academic year is at **Annex**. Members may wish to note that UGC is deliberating with the institutions on the number of UGC-funded places for the 2009-10 to 2011-12 academic years

Response to (b)

The deployment of nurses to different clusters/hospitals in HA is based on a number of workload related factors including patient population served by the cluster, patient bed days and patient turnover against existing nursing staff. The HA is currently developing a set of new ward workload standard based on patient dependency on nursing care. The new ward workload standard also takes into account staff mix, patient number as well as factors affecting workload in wards such as admission, transfer and discharge of patients. The new ward workload standard will be used as reference for deployment of nursing manpower in future.

Response to (c)

As set out in the paper issued by the Administration to the Panel on Health Services on 9 July 2007, HA adopts an integrated approach in assessing its future requirements for health workforce. The assessment methodology, which is consistent with international standards, is primarily based on the assessment of future supply and demand of healthcare professionals. The future demand includes the manpower

required to replenish staff due to retirement and turnover, as well as the manpower required for expansion of services to cater for the increasing demand from the expanding and ageing population. The supply of healthcare professionals includes the projected number of graduates from both local and overseas institutions, as well as the private practitioners to join HA.

Analysis will then be conducted to identify major imbalances between the demand and supply of different staff groups, including doctors, nurses and allied health professionals. Specific measures will be implemented accordingly to address the imbalance to maintain the manpower at a healthy level in the long term. These measures include stepping up of recruitment, enhancing retention of staff and managing staff workload through measures such as prevention of avoidable hospitalization. HA will regularly review the projection and assessment on estimation of long-term manpower demand.

Response to (d) and HA's progress report on addressing pay disparity amongst its healthcare staff

After consultation with various staff groups and unions, HA has implemented the new career structure and starting salary for staff since October 2007. The entry pay of doctors, nurses and allied health professionals has been raised to improve the remuneration package of HA staff and address staff's concerns on pay disparity. Under the new career structure of doctors, all Residents doctors undertaking specialist training will be offered a 9-year training contract subject to achievement of acceptable performance standard and specified training milestones, thereby addressing the concern of frontline doctors on job security.

HA has issued clear guidelines on performance standard of doctors to facilitate hospital management in assessing doctors' performance and in deciding the renewal of contract. Hospitals management have also been reminded of the good practice to inform staff whether their contract will be renewed at least three months before expiry of contract as far as practicable.

Yours sincerely,

(Kirk YIP)
for Secretary for Food and Health

Encl

Annex

Number of University Grants Committee(UGC)-funded and publicly funded places of medical and nursing undergraduate programmes in 2008-09 academic year

	Number of places in 2008/09 academic year
UGC-funded Medical Undergraduate Programmes (Intake number in full-time equivalent term)	250
UGC-funded Nursing Degree Programmes (Intake number in full-time equivalent term) ^{Note 1}	590
Publicly-funded Nursing Higher Diploma Programmes ^{Note 2}	410
Publicly-funded Enrolled Nurses Training Programme ^{Note 3}	390

Note

- (1) The figure includes all students admitted through the first-year-first-degree programmes or senior year undergraduate programme.
- (2) The programmes are provided by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and the Hospital Authority respectively.
- (3) The programme is provided by the Hospital Authority.