

**For information
On 11 January 2010**

Legislative Council Panel on Health Services

Employment Terms and Conditions of Hospital Authority Staff

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members on the recent developments of the employment terms and conditions of staff of the Hospital Authority (HA) to maintain a motivated and competent workforce for providing quality services to the public.

BACKGROUND

2. It is the objective of HA to provide rewarding, fair and challenging employment to all its staff, in an environment conducive to attracting, motivating and retaining well qualified staff. In determining the employment terms and conditions for its staff, HA takes into consideration a host of factors such as qualification and job requirement, career development and training needs, comparison with market practice where applicable, staff morale and financial resources available.

3. There are three broad categories of employment in HA, viz. permanent, contract or temporary, depending on the operational needs in respect of the jobs concerned. For permanent and contract employees, the remuneration package consists of three components including basic salary which is payable on a monthly basis in accordance with the relevant pay scales; core benefits which include retirement benefit, housing benefit, leave, medical and dental benefits, as well as death and disability benefits; and cash allowance/monthly allowance which is either set as a percentage of the basic salary or a fixed sum not being linked to the basic salary. For employees on temporary employment, their remuneration package consists of the basic salary and other employment benefits such as leave and retirement benefit (Mandatory Provident Fund).

4. We last briefed the Panel on Health Services on 10 January 2005 on the remuneration packages offered by HA, including the developments and changes to various aspects of the employment terms and conditions of HA staff vide LC Paper No. CB(2)535/04-05(06). Since then, HA has implemented a number of initiatives and improvement measures in response to changes in circumstances and new challenges in order to cope with the organizational needs as well as to meet the aspirations of staff. The key changes are set out in paragraphs 5 to 20 below.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Grade Reviews

5. HA has reviewed the career/pay structure of certain grades in order to better reflect the roles and responsibilities of staff, to provide more clearly defined career progression pathways and to align with market practice where applicable. The improvements arising from these reviews could also help to attract and retain qualified healthcare professionals and better motivate staff.

Doctors

6. To address the concerns of doctors about their pay and career structure, HA introduced in October 2007 new pay scales for the ranks of Resident (with starting pay raised by three pay points and maximum eight pay points) and Associate Consultant (with starting pay raised by five pay points). Examination-related increments (up to a maximum of five increments) are also granted to Residents when they have passed the relevant examinations and completed the required service in HA after obtaining the approved specialist qualification. The monthly honorarium for medical interns has also been raised by four pay points.

7. Besides, the arrangements for contract employment of Resident Trainees have been enhanced by increasing the contract period to a maximum of nine years. Contract gratuity is issued normally every three years subject to satisfactory performance and achievement of specific training milestones.

Nurses

8. To help retain nurses, develop their competency and improve their career development, HA introduced in June 2008 a new three-tier career structure which provides staff with a clinical career ladder in addition to the existing nursing management pathway. Under the new three-tier career structure which comprises Registered Nurses, Advanced Practice Nurse/Ward or Unit Manager and Nurse Consultant/Department Operations Manager, over 450 new Advanced Practice Nurse positions and new Nurse Consultant positions have been created in several clinical areas on a pilot basis. Higher rate of allowance is also given to Department Operations Manager working in large departments in recognition of their heavier managerial responsibility.

9. Furthermore, six-year employment contracts (with gratuity issued every three years subject to satisfactory performance and completion of the respective contract period) are offered to new recruits of Registered Nurse to provide a more secured employment environment to facilitate continuous clinical training and professional development. In addition, while contract employees of other grades and ranks require six years of service in the rank to be eligible for consideration of permanent employment, contract Registered Nurses with three years or more full time service in the rank and who have met the performance criteria are eligible for application of permanent terms of employment.

Others

10. HA has also reviewed the structure of some other grades to improve the function and support in other areas. For instance, the Accountant grade and the Accounting Officer grades have been merged in 2007 to improve the support for finance function in the organization. A new three-tier grade structure with upgraded entry qualification requirements has been introduced for the Medical Laboratory Technologist grade in 2008 to enhance the competency and strengthen professional accountability of the grade. To maintain a versatile information technology (IT) workforce in HA to meet the rapid changes in IT and to rationalize the job responsibilities between different work streams, a new grade structure for IT professionals has been introduced in HA in 2009 by integrating the system management and computer operation ranks.

Starting Salaries Review

11. In 2007, HA conducted a review on the starting salaries of relevant ranks in the nursing, allied health and some other grades based on a number of considerations such as comparison with market pay where applicable, the recruitment and retention situation of the grades concerned, the financial resources available for improvement, etc. Consequent to the review, HA has increased the starting salaries of a number of ranks. For instance, the entry pay for Registered Nurse and Enrolled Nurse have been raised by two pay points while that for allied health professionals has generally been raised by two to three pay points.

Employment Packages

12. HA has also introduced changes to various employment packages to boost staff morale and increase the employment flexibility in the workforce.

Granting of increment

13. New recruits joining HA from 15 June 2002 onwards were offered fixed pay point contracts without pay progression by annual increment. To address the disparity between these employees and those appointed before the above date who could earn increment by progression on their respective pay scales, a new measure has been implemented in 2005 and further enhanced in 2006 to make those employed on fixed pay point contracts eligible for increments based on years of service and satisfactory performance.

Flexible employment (part-time) package

14. To enhance the pool of qualified healthcare professionals available for servicing in HA through flexible employment, HA has enhanced the part-time contract employment package in 2007. Under the enhanced package, the pay and benefits such as leave entitlements for part-time contract staff are pro-rata to those enjoyed by HA full-time employees. Staff on the enhanced package is also entitled to a 15% contract gratuity.

Enhanced package for overseas recruitment

15. To address persistent recruitment difficulties of particular grades (e.g. Diagnostic Radiographers, Radiation Therapists and Podiatrists), HA seeks to attract new recruits from overseas and introduces for three years from 2009 a special enhanced package for offer to overseas recruits of these grades. In addition to the pay and benefits of a standard contract employment package, overseas recruits on the special package are also eligible for a one-off relocation allowance to facilitate their relocation to Hong Kong on taking up appointment at HA.

Permanent employment opportunities

16. To enhance job security, reward good performance and boost morale, permanent employment opportunities have been provided to most employees on contract full time employment in HA. Under the arrangements introduced since December 2006, most contract staff may convert to permanent employment subject to service needs, the performance and length of service of staff (normally subject to a minimum of six years of service), and the financial resources available for such appointment.

17. In 2007, a similar permanent employment package has been provided to General Services Assistants (GSAs) and Technical Service Assistants (TSAs), who are employed on temporary/contract terms to provide different support services as well as to perform duties related to patient care after appropriate training. The purpose of employment of GSA/TSAs is to reduce rigidity of the staffing structure and to break down job boundaries and promote multi-skilling of supporting staff. The offer of permanent employment package could help to maintain the continuity of service of GSA/TSAs thereby giving a relatively stable supporting workforce especially in the ward/clinical areas.

Medical Benefits

18. Under the medical benefits scheme for HA employees, HA staff and eligible members of their families are provided with drugs free of charge in HA if the drug is classified under HA drug formulary as general drug, special drug (within defined clinical indications) or self-financed item with safety net (i.e. items covered by the Samaritan Fund). As for other drugs, HA staff will have to bear the cost of using them for medical treatment.

19. In response to the views of staff, HA has enhanced the medical benefits scheme for its employees in 2008 by providing all self-financed oncology drugs under HA drug formulary to its employees and eligible members of their families free of charge. The provision is subject to the conditions that the drug is prescribed on medical grounds and that alternative free treatment of equivalent efficacy is not available in HA, or if such is available, patients do not respond well clinically to the alternative treatment.

Other Related Initiatives

20. As a caring employer, HA is also concerned about the working conditions of its staff and seeks to promote work-life balance and boost staff morale. To this end, HA has implemented various initiatives to improve the working conditions of staff, including the pilot programmes that started from end 2007 under the Doctor Work Reform, which seeks to rationalize doctors' working hours while enhancing quality of patient care through better teamwork and sharing of responsibilities. The programmes involve providing additional doctors in specialties with heavy workload, changing the night time work patterns, creating Emergency Medicine Wards, enhancing the support by trained non-medical staff, etc. HA will continue to monitor the working conditions of its staff and identify ways to manage workload while ensuring the delivery of quality service to the public.

CONCLUSION

21. HA recognizes its staff as the organization's most valuable asset and will continue to ensure that its employment terms and conditions are able to attract, retain and motivate staff while meeting organizational and service needs in the light of changing circumstances. To this end, HA will continue to maintain communication with staff and engage them in various matters including those related to human resources arrangements. In 2009, HA launched its new Vision, Mission and Values to ensure that staff members are working towards the aligned values and committed to providing the best hospital services. As part of the continuous efforts to enhance communication with staff and better involve them in decision making, particularly on matters affecting their welfare, career development and remuneration, HA has recently commenced a review of its staff consultation mechanism with a view to

engaging its staff better in developing sustainable employment terms and conditions.

22. HA will continue to work closely with its staff to solicit their support in providing quality services to the public, while also being a fair and rewarding employer.

ADVICE SOUGHT

23. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Hospital Authority
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