



香港執業藥劑師協會
THE PRACTISING PHARMACISTS ASSOCIATION OF HONG KONG
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14 November, 2011

Dear Hon. Donald Tsang, Chief Executive, HKSAR,

Re: Employment of Overseas Doctors to Serve Patients in Hong Kong

On behalf of The Practising Pharmacists Association of Hong Kong, we would like to seek for your kind assistance to resolve the current issues in regards to the current proposal of the Hong Kong Hospital Authority (HA). During the past month, the public of Hong Kong has been distressed by the controversy caused by the HA's proposal in employing overseas doctors as a measure to manage the pressing issue of manpower shortage in the HA. The leadership of the medical profession, the HA, and the Food and Health Bureau has presented their different points of views in regards to the proposal but a rational decision based on the true needs of the society still has not been made. We feel it is of paramount importance that the Chief Executive of Hong Kong should now take actions to ensure that the impartial and objective views of other stakeholders of the Hong Kong healthcare system are being carefully and seriously considered and a sound decision based on the best interests of the society at large is made to resolve the current public distress caused by the proposal of employing overseas doctors.

The Practising Pharmacists of Hong Kong, established in 1972, is one of the largest pharmacy associations in Hong Kong and consists of member pharmacists working in all sectors of pharmacy practice including the community pharmacies, private and public hospitals, manufacturing and wholesale industries, scientific research, academia, and others, As one of the important players in the Hong Kong healthcare system, we would like to formally present our views to the government in regards to the HA's proposal of employing overseas doctors as a measure to address the current manpower shortage in the HA system.

According to our understanding, the HA is proposing that a small number of doctors having been qualified in overseas countries be employed by the HA to serve Hong Kong patients. The conditions of employment include the following:



1. the overseas practitioners may only work in the HA
2. the overseas practitioners need to perform team-based medical services under the supervision of a senior medical officer
3. the duration of the service is temporary to relieve the manpower shortage of the HA
4. the overseas practitioners need not to take a standardized competency assessment to qualify for professional practice

Based on our understanding of the HA proposal, we would like to express our following views:

1. The current proposal of the HA to employ overseas practitioners should not be viewed as a stand-alone HA policy

In our view, the HA is one of the many healthcare organizations, operating in the Hong Kong health care system, providing healthcare services to Hong Kong patients. The policy to begin to employ overseas doctors to resolve manpower shortages in Hong Kong's health care system should not be viewed as a stand-alone HA policy but as an overall policy to address manpower shortages in the entire healthcare system. If the proposed policy to employ overseas doctors can only be used by the HA, it does not seem fair to other healthcare organizations operating in Hong Kong if they can not apply the same or similar policies to address their internal lack of manpower shortage. Therefore, the HA's proposal of employing overseas doctors should be discussed as an overall policy to address manpower needs of the Hong Kong health care system. If there is a genuine lack of manpower in the Hong Kong healthcare system for doctors, then we would support the employment of overseas medical practitioners that have been objectively and properly assessed to have the relevant skills and experience to serve the needs of the Hong Kong population.

2. The need for a proper, objective, and standardized competency-based examination system to qualify overseas practitioners for practice in Hong Kong

In the past, overseas healthcare professionals, including doctors and pharmacists, are required to pass a standardized examination assessment in order to qualify for practice to serve patients in Hong Kong. If the current policy to employ overseas



doctors is to be implemented, the requirement to pass a proper, objective, and standardized competency-based examination assessment is fundamental to the success of the policy. Without a proper and standardized competency-based assessment system to objectively determine the knowledge and skill levels of the overseas practitioners that have been trained by different methods with varied standards in countries around the world, there is no effective way to maintain the quality standards of the healthcare professional to serve patients in Hong Kong. Even though the duration of service may be of a short and temporary nature and the overseas doctor may only serve patients inside the HA, it is still a short-fall of the proposed policy and a risk to the safety of the Hong Kong population, that seek the healthcare services from the HA, to potentially have healthcare professionals that have not been properly and objectively assessed to be competent by Hong Kong standards to provide life-saving services to patients in Hong Kong. It is also extremely difficult for pharmacists to work together in a team-based approach with overseas doctors that have not been assessed to possess the minimum standards of knowledge and experience to be competent to fulfill the requirements of medical practitioners in Hong Kong. Therefore, in order to obtain public trust that the proposed policy will be beneficial to the public, it is crucial that a proper, standardized, and objective system to effectively measure and assess the professional knowledge and competencies of overseas doctors be in place to support the proposed policy of employing overseas doctors. In any event, the quality of medical services provided to patients in Hong Kong should be assured and not be in anyway compromised by any short-falls in the policy proposing to employ overseas trained medical professionals.

3. The need to address the long term manpower needs of healthcare organizations in Hong Kong

The current proposal by the HA to employ overseas doctors is highlighting a pressing need to the government to seriously address the long term manpower supply and demand issues for doctors in Hong Kong. The current obvious imbalance of the Hong Kong healthcare system to have an over-burdened public hospital system without sufficient medical doctors to serve excessive numbers of patients and the lack of sufficient numbers of patients to seek the services of under-utilized medical doctors in the private sector should be an issue



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of high priority for the government to fully understand and seriously address. For the best interests of the public, the HA should seek for the support and collaboration of the under-utilized private sector to relieve the current high demand for health care services as a long term measure to effectively resolve manpower issues of the HA. We are of the view that the proposed policy of employing overseas doctors can only serve as a temporary fire-fighting solution to address HA's manpower shortage situations and a more comprehensive plan to better plan for the manpower needs of doctors to serve Hong Kong in conjunction with the development of innovative private-public-partnership programs which can easily shift doctor manpower from one sector to another, to serve the varying needs of the Hong Kong community, is most necessary for the long term effectiveness of the health care system overall.

Thank you for your kind attention and look forward to your kind assistance to resolve the current and future manpower issues of the Hong Kong health care system.

Yours faithfully,
Iris Chang
President

Cc:
Hong Kong Medical Council
Hong Kong Doctors Union
Hong Kong Medical Association
Hong Kong Consumer Council
Legco Health Panel
Alliance for Patient Mutual Help Organization