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**Legislative Council**

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**Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene**

**Information note prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat  
for the meeting on 13 November 2012**

**Public consultation on "Proposals to amend the  
Veterinary Surgeons Registration Ordinance (Cap. 529)"**

The Administration launched on 8 October 2012 a public consultation on proposed amendments to the Veterinary Surgeons Registration Ordinance (Cap. 529). The purpose of the proposed amendments is to strengthen the membership of the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong and streamline its modus operandi, thereby enhancing its capacity in performing its statutory functions, including the efficient handling of complaints. The consultation will last until 30 November 2012.

2. A question in relation to complaints about veterinary services was raised at the Council meeting of 27 June 2012. The question and the Administration's reply are in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
7 November 2012

## Press Releases

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LCQ10: Complaints about veterinary services

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Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Dr York Chow, in the Legislative Council today (June 27):

Question:

Some pet owners have continuously relayed to me that veterinary surgeons practising in Hong Kong vary in standard, and there have been cases of malpractice resulting in death of animals. They have also indicated that even though the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong (the Board) handles complaints involving veterinary surgeons, the relevant process is time-consuming and the number of prosecutions instituted has been on the low side, and they request for improvement in this respect. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether it knows the number of veterinary surgeons practising in Hong Kong at present, together with the distribution of the places where they obtained their professional qualifications; the number of veterinary surgeons under complaint in the past five years;

(b) whether it knows the total number of complaints involving veterinary surgeons received by the Board in the past five years, together with the number of such cases involving death of animals;

(c) whether it knows among the complaint cases in (b), of the respective numbers of cases referred to the Preliminary Investigation Committee and the Inquiry Committee for further follow-up actions; the number of such complaint cases substantiated and the penalties imposed on the veterinary surgeons involved;

(d) whether it knows the average time required to handle a complaint case in the past five years; whether new measures will be put in place or additional manpower will be provided to shorten the handling time; and

(e) whether it will consider increasing the number of members of the Board, particularly members of the public who are not engaged in veterinary practices and representatives of animal welfare groups, with a view to enhancing the representativeness and diversity of the Board's composition; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong (the Board) is a statutory body established under the Veterinary Surgeons Registration Ordinance (Cap. 529) (VSRO). The Board consists of:

- a. a Chairman;
- b. a person who is a medical practitioner or pharmacist entitled

- to practise his profession in Hong Kong;
- c. two persons who represent the interests of users of veterinary services; and
- d. six persons who are registered veterinary surgeons, each of whom is appointed by the Secretary for Food and Health.

The Board regulates the practice of veterinary surgeons in Hong Kong. Its functions include:

- a. establishing and maintaining a register of registered veterinary surgeons;
- b. setting and reviewing the qualification standards for registration and related registration matters;
- c. advising the Government on registration matters;
- d. verifying the qualifications of persons who apply for registration;
- e. accepting or rejecting applications for registration and renewal of registration; and
- f. dealing with disciplinary offences.

According to the Rules of the Veterinary Surgeons Board (Disciplinary Proceedings),

- a. all complaints received should be referred to a Preliminary Investigation Committee (PIC) (paragraph 4); and
- b. on receipt of a referral from the PIC following preliminary investigation, the Board shall consider whether or not the complaint should be referred to a disciplinary inquiry committee (IC) (paragraph 9).

The Board reviews its operation from time to time. In response to the overall increase in the number of complaints over the past few years, the Board has proposed setting up a panel consisting of non-Board members to participate in handling complaints. This will expand the pool of manpower available to take part, by rotation, in the work of PICs and ICs formed by Board members and panel members, thus enabling more meetings to be convened. The Board has also proposed streamlining the procedures to enhance the efficiency in handling complaints. We will conduct consultations on the proposals later on.

My reply to the five parts of the question raised by the Member is as follows:

(a) As at May 31, 2012, there were 643 registered veterinary surgeons in Hong Kong. The places where they obtained their professional qualifications include Australia (266 persons), Taiwan (148 persons), United Kingdom (97 persons), South Africa (40 persons), New Zealand (20 persons), United States of America (20 persons) and other territories (52 persons). A total of 197 veterinary surgeons were the subject of complaint between 2007 and 2011.

(b) and (c) Between 2007 and 2011, the Board received 59, 49, 53, 52 and 66 complaints respectively. After receiving a complaint, the PIC will decide on further actions in the light of the information provided by the complainant, the explanations and information submitted by the veterinary surgeon being complained against and relevant evidence collected during investigation. The PIC may decide that:

- a. the complaint should be referred to the Board for inquiry; or
- b. the complaint should not be referred to the Board for inquiry; or

c. the complaint should not be referred to the Board for inquiry but a letter of advice (Remark 1) should be issued to the veterinary surgeon being complained against.

Remark 1: Generally speaking, if the veterinary surgeon being complained against does not deny having made a mistake and the Committee considers the mistake to be trivial though there is room for improvement, the Committee would issue a letter of advice to the veterinary surgeon concerned.

Of the 279 complaints received by the Board between 2007 and 2011, PICs have completed their work on 233 cases. Of the cases considered, there are 165 cases where the relevant PIC has decided that the complaints should not be referred to the Board for inquiry, and 28 cases where the PIC has decided that the complaints should not be referred to the Board for inquiry but a letter of advice should be issued to the veterinary surgeons being complained against. The number of cases referred by the Board to ICs is 40.

Among these 40 cases, the ICs have concluded action on 23 cases. The veterinary surgeons in 16 cases were found guilty of misconduct or neglect in a professional respect. Of these 16 cases, six involved deaths of animals. The penalties imposed for the 16 cases are as follows:

Penalties	Number
Temporary removal of name from the register of registered veterinary surgeons	2
Reprimand in writing	13
Warning in writing	1
Compulsory participation in continuing development programme	11
Total	27 (Remark 2)

Remark 2: As more than one type of penalty may be imposed for each case, the total number of penalties imposed (27) is more than the number of cases substantiated (16).

(d) Between 2007 and 2011, excluding cases which are still being processed, it takes, on average, about 16 months to conclude a case after a complaint was received by the Board. As has been mentioned above, in response to the overall increase in the number of complaints over the past few years, the Board has proposed setting up a panel consisting of non-Board members to participate in handling complaints. This will expand the pool of manpower available to take part, by rotation, in the work of PICs and ICs formed by Board members and panel members, thus enabling more meetings to be convened. The Board has also proposed streamlining the procedures to enhance the efficiency in handling complaints.

(e) The overall increase in the number of complaints received in recent years is such that the Board has encountered certain difficulties in arranging PIC and IC hearings. If the proposals of the Board for setting up a panel to handle complaints and streamlining the procedures are taken forward, it would help improve the above situation.

The existing VSRO already stipulates that the Board's membership should include a medical practitioner or pharmacist and two persons who represent the interests of users of veterinary services. Besides, every veterinary surgeon has

received proper training in the subject of animal welfare in their professional education programme and made an oath in this respect to ensure that high standards of animal welfare are maintained in their practice.

Members of the public are welcome to express their views on the Board's complaint handling work during the consultation exercise to be conducted later on.

Ends/Wednesday, June 27, 2012

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