

Written Submission for the Bills Committee members

I am Diane Lu, currently the only board-certified veterinary neurologist in Hong Kong. Following my 5 year undergraduate training in veterinary neurology, it took another 4 years of postgraduate training before sitting the board examination in Veterinary Neurology. I returned to work full-time in HK in 2003, in a private veterinary clinic (Peace Avenue Veterinary Clinic) until now. Over the past 12 years, I witnessed the veterinary community has expanded dramatically in that the number of registered vets increased from 304 (2003) to over 721 (Sept 2014), more veterinary clinics open up and many more young vets graduated from overseas and coming back to HK to work as veterinarians.

The functions of the Hong Kong Veterinary Surgeons Board (HKVSB) is clearly listed out in Veterinary Surgeon Registration Ordinance (VSRO) Cap. 529, part II, no. 5. Amongst all functions, it is crystal clear that there is a much greater demand to deal with accumulated disciplinary offences (inquiry cases) over the past few years more efficiently, and with the increasing numbers of vets who wish to apply for registration to practice in Hong Kong, we have to safeguard that they are up to the qualification standards, thus not to jeopardize the welfare of pet animals in HK. In addition, we also have to ensure the registered vets in HK keep up with their continuing education, and improving their knowledge and standards with this growing field.

I was appointed as Member of the Veterinary Board from 15th Sept 2012, for a period of two years. The reason I joined the Board is that I would like to help the Board and our veterinary community to improve and be one of the representative, in a way ensuring companion animals (pets) in HK can receive veterinary services which are up to standard. To ensure VSB remains a professional self-regulatory body, sufficient numbers of veterinarians (preferably practicing vets) are vital to represent the Board. After I joined the Board, I realized that the only way to be more efficient to fulfill the Board's function is to increase the number of Board members, preferably active clinicians, as clinicians are working in the frontline who know best what we are facing in reality.

I strongly believe that HKVSB should at least keep the Vet to non-vet ratio at 2:1, even better if could increase the ratio of vets to non-vets to more

than 2:1, say 3:1 or more. In this way, the veterinary profession could expand in a healthy way and deal with mainly veterinary issues which only veterinary peers could understand and handle with professionalism. There are loads of paper work such as dealing with application of registration, approval of permit, referral of complaint to inquiry committee (IC), appointment of membership of IC and chairperson, and many meetings discussing professional issues etc. I cannot image a layperson, especially they are not in the veterinary field (although the medical field probably understand us better than other professionals), would be able to understand the complexity of veterinary medicine and surgery, the medical terms, and the many different techniques available to treat a disease, the pros and cons etc. So how could they judge unbiased if are asked to sit in an IC?

Some LegCo members suggest a 1:1 vet to non-vet ratio, the reason is to oversee the veterinary surgeons, so that the vets are not covering for each other, especially during a complaint case. I don't think this is necessary at all, as being a professional veterinary surgeon with self-discipline, to follow ethical standards (veterinarian has to take an oath on graduation day) and the Code of Practice for the Guidance of Registered Veterinary Surgeons ("the Code") set out for every vets in HK to follow. Any registered veterinary surgeons who breached the Code will be found guilty. So the vets in HK are actually supervising each other. The Board has taken every complaint case seriously all along and the ICs that I have sat so far (as one of the committee members) we have to declare any conflict of interest, ensuring the IC is transparent, fair and unbiased; not to mention that the public is welcomed to sit in the open session of an IC.

The prolonged time to deal with a complaint case (over 16 months) is another reason why I think expanding the number of VSB members by recruiting more clinical veterinarians (CV) is so important. More CV on the Board means more professional manpower to deal with complaints more efficiently. There is no veterinary school in HK and only a small numbers of specialists, and to handle disciplinary offences of a medical base, overseas experts' opinions were sorted and if necessary they are invited to attend the ICs. To arrange time for all IC committee members and defendant, and the overseas experts to attend a meeting, this is a timely issue, and in some cases more than one meeting is necessary to draw an conclusion. It is our goal to shorten the complaint handling time only if there are more CV on the Board

to do the job.

Although side-tracked in regarding to overcharges, I think this is another matter totally unrelated to the 2:1 ratio discussion. However I have to mention that in "The Code", Part II, E. Professional Relationships between Veterinarians and Clients 17.6. "Veterinary Surgeons should not charge exorbitant, discriminatory, inconsistent or reduced fees whether to discourage or attract clients or to seek financial gain in excess of what would be deemed commensurate with the service and work provided. Veterinarians should provide itemized accounts to clients upon request." Hong Kong is a free-market, due to different locations, rental difference, and different number of staff hired, use of different quality machines (X-ray, ultrasound, endoscopy, C-arm fluoroscopy, MRI, CT etc), materials and medicine (for example: different companies, branded or generic drugs are of different prices), prices are different. Even same surgical procedure performed on different patients involves different planes and time of anaesthesia, different levels of technique required, different materials used during procedures (for example: one patient require special hemostasis sponge to stop excessive bleeding, but another patient doesn't). Most veterinary clinics are self-financed, receiving no subsidization from any financial bodies. Same as in everywhere in Hong Kong, when rent, labour, water, electricity price rise, the extra cost will have to be inevitably transferred to the clients. Ask yourself truthfully- do you believe there is something called "cheap medical service" which could provide first-class service and State-of-the-Art specialized surgery for your family members? Without any trade-off at all? And if "cheap medical service without trade-off" does not exist, why would someone demanding the same for veterinary service, if one sees their pets as their family members?

Yours sincerely

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