



Legislative Council
Bills Committee on Medical Registration (Amendment) Bill 2016
Second Meeting on 11 April 2016

Written Submission by the Hospital Authority

Hospital Authority (HA) is a statutory body and a major healthcare provider in Hong Kong. HA currently employs more than 5600 full-time equivalent doctors. The public healthcare services delivered by the HA include a comprehensive range of primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary services covering a complete spectrum from acute, rehabilitation and day inpatient services, specialist and general outpatient services to community and outreach services. Each year, HA provides services to more than three million Hong Kong residents.

HA's Response

2. HA noted the explanatory memorandum on the proposed amendments set out in the Bill on the following items :

- To increase the number of lay persons on the Medical Council of Hong Kong and its committees;
- To enable the Council to establish more than one Preliminary Investigation Committee;
- To extend the term of registration of medical practitioners with limited registration;
- To change the quorum for disciplinary inquiries and increase the number of assessors;
- To enable solicitor or counsel to be appointed to carry out the Secretary's duties in respect of inquiries;
- To increase the number of legal advisers to the Council; and
- To provide for incidental matters and make related technical amendments.

3. HA fully supports all the amendments to the Medical Registration Ordinance proposed by the Government as they would enhance the governance of MCHK and appropriately respond to the public concern.

4. Particularly, HA would like to express our opinions and views with regard to the extension of the term of registration of medical practitioners with limited registration. HA is facing increasing service demand due to aging population, advancement in technology and growing public expectation for healthcare services. In view of the reduction of intake of medical students in 2003, the number of local medical graduates fell from the original 310 a year to 280 a year between 2007 and 2009 and further down to 250 between 2011 to 2014. With the subsequent increase in medical student intake, the number of local graduates started to pick up to 320 in 2015. Over the years, HA has been experiencing serious shortage of doctors against attrition, service growth, initiatives to improve quality of care and new service programs. Currently, the total doctor shortfall has accumulated to more than 300. The shortfall results in long waiting time for non-urgent services in specialist out-patient clinics, elective surgeries and inadequate service capacity in general out-patient clinics. The service impact is obvious during the Winter Surge period revealing the inadequate in-patient capacity to managing surge demand.

5. To cope with aging population, the Government has already initiated the long-term capital work plans for building new hospitals and engaging hospital re-development projects in coming 10 years. The policy address and the budget speech 2016 has earmarked \$200 billion for increasing hospital beds to meet the service need. To address doctor shortage, the Government has also developed initiatives with the Medical Council of Hong Kong by implementing measures to refine the arrangements for the licensing examination including increasing examination sittings to twice a year and considering more flexibility in internship arrangements. The Government is increasing the number of publicly-funded degree places in medicine by 50 in 2016/17 to 2018/19 triennium and make the intake of total medical students to 470 from 2016 onward. The Government will also complete the strategic review of the healthcare manpower planning and professional development with the purpose to secure sufficient doctor supply in long term. However, the newly admitted medical students have to undergo seven-year undergraduate training to become registrable doctors and 6 more years for fellowship training to become specialist doctors. HA anticipates that in the coming 10 years, the shortage in number of doctors or doctors with the required expertise will remain a limiting factor for the public healthcare system to enhance her services.

6. Since 2012, HA has initiated the recruitment of non-local doctors under limited registration as one of the interim measures to increase doctor manpower. Nevertheless, the regulation set for MCHK can only approve the license of limited registration maximum up to 12 months. As such, potential overseas candidates find it very difficult to quit their current job and accept the one-year employment to work in Hong Kong. Under the current restriction, most of the candidates who applied for the service posts would only stay in Hong Kong for the one-year contract and then return to their original countries of practicing medicine after end of the contract. According to the results of the recruitment in the past four years, HA could only

successfully recruit 27 non-local doctors, five of them withdrew their acceptance and had not reported duty, 11 doctors left after completing contracts and there are only 11 non-local doctors currently working in HA hospitals. With this scale of successful recruitment and retention, the scheme could not have significant impact in addressing the medical manpower shortfall in the public healthcare system.

7. With the amendment in extension of the term of limited registration from one year to three years, HA believes that the recruitment scheme could be attractive to overseas applicants and better able to retain expertise. HA supports the amendment on the extension of the term of limited registration from one year to three years.

Hospital Authority

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