

For Discussion
on 13 December 1999

LegCo Panel on Health Services

Registration of Ancillary Dental Personnel

Purpose

This paper sets out the Administration's views on the proposal to introduce a statutory registration system for Ancillary Dental Personnel (ADP).

Background

2. ADP includes dental therapists (DTs), dental hygienists (DHs), dental technicians (DTechs) and dental surgery assistants (DSAs). A summary of their different scopes of work and qualifications is at **Annex**. At present, DHs are required, under the Ancillary Dental Workers (Dental Hygienists) Regulations under the Dentists Registration Ordinance (Cap. 156), to be enrolled with the Dental Council of Hong Kong. The Regulations provide for the qualifications required for a person to be enrolled as a dental hygienist. They also specify the kind of dental work an enrolled dental hygienist may undertake and the conditions under which he/she may undertake the dental work. There is no similar enrolment system for the other three types of ADP.

3. As reported to Members on 13 September 1999, the ADP and the dental practitioners held different views on the establishment of a statutory registration system for ADP. While the ADP generally supported the introduction of such a system for all four types of ADP, the dental profession did not consider compulsory registration of ADP necessary.

Recommendations

4. All ADP work under the instructions and/or supervision of registered dentists, who prescribe the treatment to be carried out on the patients and ensure it is safe and appropriate. Under this general supervisory

framework, the four types of ADP perform different types of work and require different levels of skills. As regards whether some form of registration system for ADP should be introduced, it will be more appropriate to address each type of ADP separately. Our recommendations are set out in the following paragraphs.

(a) *Dental Hygienists*

5. DHs are already regulated by an enrolment system, which is simple and effective. The system ensures that a person not having undergone a certain level of training is not allowed to work as a dental hygienist. It also spells out clearly that dental hygienists are to perform their duties under the directions of the registered dentists. The arrangement is adequate for the protection of the patients and we propose to maintain the status quo.

(b) *Dental Technicians*

6. Unlike the other types of ADP, DTechs have no direct contact with patients. They work independently in dental laboratories fabricating dental appliances according to the instructions of dentists. The dentists are responsible for ensuring the quality of the appliances before fitting them into the oral cavity of the patients. To ensure consistent practice standards, we propose to introduce an enrolment system, similar to the one for dental hygienists, for dental technicians, ensuring that persons fabricating dental appliances must have received proper training or obtained sufficient experience. The enrolment system will formalize the working relationship between DTechs and dentists. Consideration will be given to the large number of “grandfathers” when the enrolment requirements of DTechs are determined.

(c) *Dental Therapists*

7. All DTs work in the Department of Health and are permitted to perform minor dental work, on the condition that they should practise under the instructions of dental officers. Since there are already clear and strict practice guidelines regulating the work of DTs, thus offering sufficient protection to the patients, we do not consider an additional regulatory system necessary.

(d) *Dental Surgery Assistants*

8. The scope of work of DSAs is not clearly defined, and DSAs work under the close personal supervision of dentists, who are accountable for the work of the DSAs under their supervision. Dentists are expected to provide

necessary training to the DSAs to enable them to perform their duties properly. In the circumstances, we do not consider it necessary or practicable to introduce a regulatory system for DSAs.

9. Subject to the views of this Panel, we shall consult the relevant professions about our proposals.

Advice Sought

10. In summary, we propose to extend the enrolment system for DHs to DTechs and maintain the status quo for the other types of ADP. Members are invited to comment on the recommendations in paragraphs 5 to 9 above.

Health and Welfare Bureau
December 1999

Annex**Ancillary Dental Personnel in Hong Kong**

	Dental Hygienists	Dental Therapists	Dental Technicians	Dental Surgery Assistants
Scope of work	Can undertake the following procedures under the supervision of registered dentists : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cleaning & polishing of teeth • scaling of teeth • application of fluoride solutions or other prophylactic solutions to the teeth • oral health education 	Carry out the following to patients up to the age of 18 under supervision of dental officers : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple operative dental work, simple extraction and preventive measures • oral health education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not provide direct service to patients • They work in dental laboratories and are responsible for the fabrication of dental prostheses to the specifications of dentists 	Assist dentists at the chairside in the treatment and care of patients. They are responsible for : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preparing patients for dental treatment • care of equipment, instruments and materials • simple laboratory procedures (pouring dental impressions) • oral hygiene instructions
Total workforce (as at Jan 1999)	Total enrolled = 152 Active = 60 [@]	338	600-700* [@]	2000-3000* [@]
Training opportunity	1-year certificate course at PPDH ¹	3-year certificate course at TSK DTTS ²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-year diploma course at PPDH • apprenticeship in private dental laboratories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-year certificate course at PPDH • Government in-service training programme • In-service training by private dental practitioners
Employer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government • PPDH • Private sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government • PPDH • Private sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government • PPDH • Private sector

¹ Prince Philip Dental Hospital² Tang Shiu Kin Dental Therapist Training School

* some of the workforce are working part-time only

[@] estimated number