

DH urges public not to consult non-healthcare professionals under regulation

â€œIn response to recent media reports on suspected non-healthcare professionals providing "bone manipulating" services, the Department of Health (DH) today (September 2) responded as follows:

In order to safeguard public health and safety, there is a regulatory system in place for healthcare professions in Hong Kong. Among them, there are 13 healthcare professions (Note 1) who are required to undergo statutory registration in order to practise in Hong Kong so as to ascertain that their qualifications are up to standards, and that their professional conducts are regulated by relevant statutory boards and councils. Any person who practises as these healthcare professions or uses these healthcare profession titles without registration may violate relevant laws. In addition, the government has also established an Accredited Registers Scheme for Healthcare Professions as a voluntary accreditation system for five healthcare professions (Note 2).

The DH urges members of the public to check the qualifications of service providers before receiving healthcare services. They should consult healthcare professionals under regulation for medical diagnosis or when receiving those treatment with higher risks. Members of the public should not casually believe the claims of being able to offer specialised treatments for diseases or injuries from certain personnel who are not registered or accredited as healthcare professionals. Since the professional qualifications and standards of these personnel have not been attested, the safety and effectiveness of the "treatment" could not be assured, and "the treatment" may even worsen the condition or cause injury.

For "bone-manipulating" service, there are a number of healthcare professions in which their scope of practice may involve treatment of similar nature. If the service involves the application of traditional Chinese medicine theory to perform acts or activities prescribed in the Chinese Medicine Ordinance, such practice could be considered as "practising Chinese medicine". According to section 2 of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance, "practising Chinese medicine" means any of the following act or activities-

1. the diagnosis, treatment, prevention or alleviation of any disease or any symptom of a disease;
2. the prescription of Chinese herbal medicines or proprietary Chinese medicines;
3. the regulation of the functional states of the human body,

on the basis of traditional Chinese medicine in general practice, acupuncture or bone-setting.

According to section 108 of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance, any person who not being a registered or listed Chinese medicine practitioner (CMP) practises Chinese medicine commits an offence. The offender is liable to a fine at level 6 and imprisonment for 3 years upon conviction.

In addition, if it involves assessment and treatment by means of remedial exercises or manual therapy of physical disabilities, it might be considered as performing the profession of physiotherapists as stipulated in the Schedule of Cap. 359 Supplementary Medical Professions Ordinance. Section 21 of the Supplementary Medical Professions Ordinance stipulated that a person who practises a profession of physiotherapist without being registered commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine at level 2 and to imprisonment for 6 months. According to section 24(h) of Cap. 428 Chiropractors Registration Ordinance, any person who is not having his name entered in the register of chiropractors, practises chiropractic commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine at level 5 and to imprisonment for one year. The Code of Practice promulgated by Chiropractors Council mentioned that chiropractic is concerned with the pathogenesis, diagnostics, therapeutics and prophylaxis of functional disturbances, pathomechanical states, pain syndromes and neurophysiological effects related to the statics and dynamics of the locomotor system, especially of the spine and pelvis.

Members of the public who suspect that someone is practising without registration and/or falsely using the title of a registered healthcare professional should report to the Police. The DH and the statutory boards and councils of relevant healthcare professions will provide professional support to the Police as appropriate.

If members of the public have doubts about the qualifications of the healthcare professionals, they can request the person concerned to provide relevant certification documents. The public can also access the websites of the statutory boards and committees of relevant healthcare professions (www.dh.gov.hk/english/main/main_rhp/main_rhp.html) for the list of various healthcare professions.

Note 1: These 13 healthcare professions are medical practitioners, dentists, nurses, Chinese medicine practitioners, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, medical laboratory technologists, optometrists, radiographers, chiropractors, dental hygienists, midwives and pharmacists.

Note 2: These 5 healthcare professions are speech therapists, audiologists, dietitians, educational psychologists and clinical psychologists.