

FHB exchanges views with HKAM on Medical Registration (Amendment) Bill 2021

The Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, met with the Council members of the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine (HKAM) last evening (September 3) to exchange views on the Medical Registration (Amendment) Bill 2021 and the latest amendments proposed by the Government. At the meeting, Professor Chan explained to members of HKAM the rationale and details of the Government's latest proposal and responded to their views.

Regarding the views of HKAM members on the employment prospects for local medical graduates, the recognition of non-locally awarded specialist qualification and issues related to specialist training, the Government would like to highlight the following points:

(1) Legislative amendments aim to alleviate manpower shortage of doctors in public healthcare institutions

By proposing the Bill and the subsequent amendments, the Government seeks to attract more qualified non-locally trained doctors to practise in public healthcare institutions in Hong Kong so as to alleviate the manpower shortage of doctors there in the interest of the public, without compromising the quality of doctors. The Government understands that the public is most concerned about the quality of non-locally trained doctors. Therefore, the special registration doctors will in the future be subject to multiple monitoring to ensure their quality, including possession of specialist qualifications recognised or awarded by HKAM.

(2) Ensuring internship and job opportunities for local medical graduates

The Government has proactively devoted substantial resources to increase medical training places in the two local medical schools from 250 places annually in the 2008/09 academic year to the current 530 places annually, an increase of more than one-fold. The Government is also contemplating a further increase in the medical training places for the next University Grants Committee triennium. Even with admission of more non-locally trained doctors in the foreseeable future, the Government will uphold its commitment in the 2018 Policy Agenda. The Hospital Authority (HA) will provide internship places to all qualified local medical graduates, employ all those who have passed the internship, and provide them with specialist training. We believe that these measures could allay local medical graduates' concern about job security.

(3) HKAM's role as gatekeeper of specialist qualifications remains unchanged

According to the Government's latest proposal, if a non-Hong Kong permanent resident (non-HKPR) or a limited registration doctor holding a non-

locally awarded specialist qualification wishes to become a special registration doctor, his or her non-locally awarded specialist qualification must be recognised by the HKAM. The HKAM has currently an established mechanism to evaluate, review and recognise non-locally awarded specialist qualifications. We reiterate that the Government respects professional autonomy. For future special registration applicants, irrespective of whether they are HKPRs, their non-locally awarded specialist qualifications must be recognised by HKAM in accordance with the existing mechanism. There is no question of HKAM's role as the gatekeeper of specialist qualifications being fundamentally altered.

(4) Supporting local specialist training

We understand that the medical sector and local medical graduates are concerned about the allocation of specialist training places and whether there are adequate training places for both locally and non-locally trained doctors. Currently, the HA has an established mechanism to hire non-locally trained doctors and provide them with specialist training. Under the current mechanism, the HA will create supernumerary posts with dedicated funding allocation from the Government for hiring non-locally trained doctors so that recruitment and promotion of locally trained doctors will not be affected.

In view of the future increase in non-locally trained doctors, the Food and Health Bureau is planning to set up a new platform and invite representatives from the HA, the Department of Health and the HKAM to discuss matters related to specialist training, including the number of training places and necessary supporting infrastructure, based on the specialist manpower projection to be announced later this year. The Government will deploy additional resources as necessary to support specialist training. Whilst understanding locally trained doctors' concerns on the allocation system of specialist training places, we hope that non-locally trained doctors will not be short of specialist training choices. As such, we will discuss with the HA the relevant allocation system and strive to strike a delicate balance in this regard.

In the past few months, we staged more than 30 consultation sessions, and met with representatives from about 70 organisations / bodies to listen to their views on the Bill, including the Medical Council of Hong Kong, the HKAM, the Hong Kong Medical Association, the two local medical schools (including medical students), frontline doctors unions, private hospitals, patient organisations, the education sector and parents groups. Having listened to the views of various stakeholders and for the overall interest of Hong Kong, the Government decided to propose revisions to the Bill.

The Government will continue to engage with different stakeholders, including young doctors and medical students, to explain details of the Bill. We hope that members of the Legislative Council (LegCo) and the community can support the amendments so as to secure the early passage of the Bill in the LegCo, hence more qualified non-locally trained doctors will be able to come or return to Hong Kong to serve citizens in the public healthcare system. On the other hand, the Government will continue to implement various improvement and new measures to enhance public healthcare services, such as retaining HA

doctors and nurses, promoting public-private partnership, upgrading hospital hardware facilities and promoting primary healthcare services, etc.