

First batch of amendments to Dentists Registration Ordinance to take effect from January 1 next year

The Government announced today (November 21) that a new mechanism for the admission of non-locally trained dentists to Hong Kong will commence under the Dentists Registration Ordinance (DRO) (Cap. 156) with effect from January 1 next year to address the demand for local dental services. In addition, other technical amendments will take effect under the DRO, including an update on the definition of "practising dentistry", to clearly specify the services that may only be provided by registered dentists, with a view to offering better protection for citizens' health.

Following the passage of the Dentists Registration (Amendment) Bill 2024 by the Legislative Council in July, the Government subsequently tabled the first commencement notice and the Dentists Registration (Fees) Regulation at the Legislative Council in October for negative vetting. The vetting period ended yesterday (November 20), enabling the amended provisions to be implemented in phases. Other amendments will take effect on later dates.

Admission of non-locally trained dentists

New pathways will be introduced under the DRO to admit qualified non-locally trained dentists, including limited registration (LR), which is open to all dentists and special registration (SR) targeting specialist dentists. Starting from January 1 next year, non-locally trained dentists who are selected for full-time employment in specified institutions, including the Department of Health (DH), the Hospital Authority, the University of Hong Kong and the Prince Philip Dental Hospital, may apply to the Dental Council of Hong Kong (DCHK) for LR or SR and, upon approval, directly practise in the aforementioned specified institutions.

Non-locally trained dentists who have worked in specified institution(s) for at least five years in aggregate and are certified by the institution(s) to have served satisfactorily by reference to the DCHK's criteria will be eligible to apply for migration to full registration. Among them, dentists with LR will need to take the clinical part of the DCHK's licensing examination. For dentists with SR, whether they are required to take that part of the examination will be subject to the DCHK's consideration on a case-by-case basis. Upon obtaining full registration, these dentists can practise in any institution in Hong Kong.

To dovetail with the aforementioned amendments, the DH has already launched recruitment exercises while working closely with the DCHK in a bid to enable the first batch of non-locally trained dentists to come to Hong Kong in the first quarter of next year to serve the public.

Temporary registration (TR) will also be introduced under the DRO.

Starting from January 1 next year, any person may apply to the DCHK for having dentists from other jurisdictions conduct clinical teaching or research for him or her in Hong Kong for a period not exceeding 14 days. Dentists with TR cannot migrate to full registration.

Update on definition of "practising dentistry"

With effect from January 1 next year, the definition of "practising dentistry" under the DRO will be updated to bring the regulatory regime up to date. Among them, Schedule 2 to the DRO will clearly specify that only registered dentists may provide another person with the following services: (1) the carrying out of dental bleaching or teeth whitening procedure; (2) the prescription of clear aligner; and (3) the carrying out of teeth veneering procedure.

Any person provides or attempts to provide the aforementioned services but not being a registered dentist will commit an offence. The offender will be liable on summary conviction to a fine at level 6 and to imprisonment for three years, or on conviction upon indictment to imprisonment for five years.

The Government urges citizens not to take lightly claims from unregistered persons about their ability to offer any so-called "dental services" for their own health. Citizens may check before choosing dental services against the List of Registered Dentists published by the DCHK online (www.dchk.org.hk/en/list/list.htm) to verify the qualifications of service providers. If in doubt, citizens should refrain from receiving such services to ensure safety.