

Government responds to media enquiries on proposed admission of non-locally trained Hong Kong doctors

In response to media enquiries on the proposed admission of non-locally trained Hong Kong doctors to practise in the public healthcare institutions of Hong Kong, the Food and Health Bureau gave the following response today (February 5):

On the proposal to attract more qualified non-locally trained Hong Kong doctors to practise in public healthcare institutions of Hong Kong, the Government emphasised that it is an irrefutable fact that there is currently a shortage of doctors in Hong Kong. For per capita doctor ratio, Hong Kong has a ratio of two doctors per 1 000 population which lags behind other advanced economies, including Singapore (2.5), Japan (2.5), the United States (2.6), the United Kingdom (3.0) and Australia (3.8). Furthermore, there is undoubtedly insufficient doctors in the public healthcare sector. Currently, the waiting time of specialty services in the Hospital Authority is extremely long. The waiting time for routine cases in some areas (e.g. Medicine, Ophthalmology and Orthopaedics & Traumatology) is over 100 weeks. The situation is unacceptable.

To this end, the Government considers it necessary to amend the Medical Registration Ordinance (Cap. 161) to create a new pathway to allow more qualified non-locally trained doctors to come back to Hong Kong and practise in our public healthcare sector so as to expand our pool of doctors. On the details of the proposal, the following points should be emphasised:

1. Licensing Examination is not the only way to ensure the quality of doctors

At present, many countries in the world (such as Singapore, the United Kingdom, and Australia) have different mechanisms to attract non-locally trained doctors. Subject to fulfillment of certain criteria, non-locally trained doctors will be granted full registration in the respective country. Passing the examinations is not the only condition for obtaining full registration. We wish to reiterate that the Government is not abolishing the current licensing examination system, but on the premise of ensuring the quality of doctors, creating a new pathway for qualified non-locally trained doctors to practise in the public healthcare sector of Hong Kong.

2. The proposal does not bypass the Medical Council of Hong Kong (the Medical Council)

The Government respects the Medical Council's statutory function to regulate doctors. As the Medical Council is a major stakeholder in the medical profession, we propose appointing the Chairman of the Medical Council to join the committee responsible for formulating the list of recognised medical

schools. We would like to emphasise that non-locally trained doctors who will practise in Hong Kong through the new pathway will still need to register under the Medical Council and will be subject to its disciplinary oversight like other local doctors.

3. Non-locally trained doctors still need to be assessed

Under the new pathway, non-locally trained doctors are required to undergo on-the-job assessment conducted by their employer (i.e. relevant public healthcare institutions) to ensure their standard. If the doctor concerned fails to pass the on-the-job assessment, he might not have his contract renewed and hence would not be able to work in the relevant public healthcare institution for five consecutive years in order to obtain formal registration in Hong Kong. We are open to how to enhance the on-the-job assessment and will further discuss with the relevant public healthcare institutions.

4. A higher requirement on non-locally trained doctors

Non-locally trained doctors who will practise in Hong Kong through the new pathway must graduate from the recognised medical schools, complete the internship and have been registered as medical practitioners in their respective places. They are further required to work in relevant public healthcare institutions in Hong Kong for five to twelve years before obtaining full registration here. In comparison, locally trained doctors can obtain full registration after completing the internship and practise in private sector. We are actually imposing a higher requirement on non-locally trained doctors.

The Government will be meeting representatives of the medical profession in batches starting next week, and will hold public consultation sessions to gauge public views. After consultations, we will submit the Medical Registration (Amendment) Bill to the Legislative Council in the second quarter of this year.