

HA approves the arrangement concerning staff absence

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

At the Administrative and Operational Meeting today (November 27), the Hospital Authority (HA) Board discussed and approved the human resources arrangement concerning staff absent from duty in February 2020.

The HA Chairman, Mr Henry Fan, said, "Hong Kong's healthcare professionals are highly commended for their professionalism, both locally and internationally, for always putting patients first and treating every patient equally. Their dedication to duties, which helped us overcome numerous public health crises, is also the expectation of the community and our patients.

"In early February this year, public healthcare services were seriously affected due to the absence from duty of some 7,000 staff members without authorisation. During the period, some elective surgeries, general out-patient and specialist out-patient clinic services were cancelled, while operation of some clinical departments and emergency services were also affected. The HA has expressed its objection to the staff concerned and made repeated public appeals to urge them to return to work as soon as possible to maintain 24-hour emergency services and normal hospital operations."

The HA subsequently received thousands of instances of feedback, requests for assistance and complaints about the incident, and the HA has followed up and responded accordingly. It was noted that some professional regulatory bodies have also received related complaints.

The HA has always strived to handle the staff absence issue in a reasonable, lawful and fair manner. After considering the legal advice, the HA issued a letter to the employees concerned, requesting them to confirm the days of absence and explain the reason behind them. Replies from more than 7 000 staff members have been received and the attendance records are being verified to determine their actual days of absence.

"The HA Board today discussed and decided with due consideration of legal advice, the Employment Ordinance, the human resources policy, the employment contract and staff morale, to recover the wages paid to the employees in respect of their verified dates of absence from duty during February 3 to 7, 2020. The Board also decided that there would not be any other human resources follow-up arrangement. The HA will recalculate the wages of the absent employees for the month of February 2020. The differences will be reflected in subsequent payroll. The HA believes that this arrangement has addressed the staff absence matter in a reasonable, lawful and fair manner," said Mr Fan.

"Notwithstanding the epidemic of COVID-19 in the past months, the public healthcare system has remained safe and sound. The incident of staff absence happened all of a sudden in February. Fortunately, the majority of our staff were committed and dedicated to serving the patients professionally. These colleagues have shouldered additional workloads to maintain emergency and essential healthcare services before the return of other colleagues to resume normal hospital services. All along, the community has witnessed and highly commended the efforts of frontline staff in combating the epidemic. I sincerely hope that the decision this time will ease the concerns of staff members. Let us focus again on our duties professionally in response to the winter service surge and the new wave of COVID-19," he remarked.