

LCQ11: Medical and nursing manpower

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Chun-ying and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (March 27):

Question:

In 2016, Hong Kong had 1.9 doctors and 7.1 nurses per 1 000 persons, and such ratios were lower than those of Singapore and Japan. In addition, as the population of Hong Kong will continue to grow and age in the coming two decades (with the elderly population in 2036 rising by more than one million compared with that of 2016), it is expected that the shortage of medical and nursing manpower will aggravate. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will set target ratios of (i) doctor to population and (ii) nurse to population; if so, of the details and the timetable; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as the Report of Strategic Review on Healthcare Manpower Planning and Professional Development of 2017 projects that the shortfalls in medical and nursing manpower will continue to aggravate (with the shortfalls rising to 1 007 doctors and 1 669 general nurses respectively in 2030), whether the Government has introduced new measures to reduce such shortfalls and assessed the effectiveness of such measures; and

(3) given that the retirement age for those doctors and nurses recruited by the Hospital Authority (HA) since June 2015 has been raised from 60 to 65, whether it knows if HA will raise the retirement age to 65 across the board for doctors and nurses recruited before June 2015; the measures put in place by HA to attract more retired doctors and nurses to accept rehiring offers?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Chun-ying is as follows:

(1) The Government has not set any target doctors/nurses-to-population ratio. Regarding the Hospital Authority (HA), different types and levels of services are provided to patients having regard to the conditions and needs of each patient. Therefore the HA does not prescribe any doctors/nurses-to-patients ratio. Nevertheless, the HA has established a mechanism for assessing manpower needs and conducting manpower planning to ensure that there is sufficient doctors/nurses to meet the service demand. The HA will continue to keep in view the manpower situation and make appropriate arrangements in manpower planning to cope with the growing demand for healthcare services.

(2) Over the past decade, the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded medical and nursing training places have been increased substantially from 250 and about 520 in the 2005/06 academic year to 470 and 630 in the 2016/17 academic year respectively. In the 2019/20 to 2021/22 UGC triennium, the Government will further increase the numbers of UGC-funded medical and nursing training places both by 60 each year. The Government will also subsidise 1 160 students to pursue self-financing undergraduate programmes in nursing under the Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors in the 2019/20 academic year, representing an increase of about 400 places compared with that of the 2018/19 academic year. We expect that increasing the number of training places will alleviate the manpower shortage of healthcare staff in the medium to long term.

The HA will employ all qualified locally trained medical graduates and provide them with relevant specialist training. It is expected that there will be a total of over 2 000 medical graduates becoming registered doctors in the coming five years. The HA will also employ all fresh graduate nurses and non-fresh graduate nurses who are willing to work in the HA.

In addition, the HA will continue to proactively implement the following human resources measures to retain professionals and alleviate the shortage of manpower:

(a) The HA will actively recruit non-locally trained doctors under limited registration, part-time and temporary healthcare staff, as well as agency nurses and supporting staff. Further to the establishment of the Locum Office, the HA launched the Locum Recruitment Website in November 2018 to expedite the process of recruiting part-time staff. To alleviate the manpower shortage and assist in knowledge transfer, the HA also implemented the Special Retired and Rehire Scheme to hire retiring doctors, nurses and supporting staff to continue to perform clinical duties on a full-time basis.

(b) To retain doctors, the HA set up the centrally co-ordinated additional Associate Consultant Promotion Mechanism in 2011-12 to create more promotion opportunities. HA will also provide its doctors with more training courses and overseas training opportunities.

(c) To retain frontline nursing staff, the HA reinstated the annual increment mechanism in April 2018 to boost staff morale. On training and promotion of nursing staff, the HA created the post of Nurse Consultant in 2008-09 to enhance the development prospects of the nursing profession. A total of 1 476 nurses were promoted in the past three years. Besides, the HA provides subsidies each year for over 100 experienced nurses to undergo further studies and training overseas. To enhance preceptorship support for newly recruited nurses, the HA recruits experienced nurses under the Preceptorship Programme to serve as preceptors and provide guidance for newly recruited nurses in the actual clinical setting. This also helps alleviate the work pressure of experienced nursing staff in coaching new nurses.

The HA will continue to introduce medium to long-term measures, including actively considering providing more flexible options in work

arrangements to retain staff, such as allowing frontline professionals who are temporarily unable to work full-time due to special needs or for health or family reasons to work on a part-time basis under special work arrangements.

(3) The HA has implemented the Special Retired and Rehire Scheme since 2015-16 to rehire suitable healthcare professionals after their retirement, so as to retain professionals to provide training, impart knowledge and alleviate the manpower shortage in the HA. For the time being, the HA has no plan to raise the retirement age to 65 across the board for doctors and nurses recruited before June 2015.