

LCQ12: Diagnoses and treatments provided by clinical psychologists

Following is a question by the Hon Lam Cheuk-ting and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (November 28):

Question:

Regarding the diagnoses and treatments provided by clinical psychologists, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the following details of the diagnoses and treatments provided in the past three years by clinical psychologists employed respectively by (i) government departments and (ii) the Hospital Authority:

- (a) the respective numbers of full-time and part-time clinical psychologists;
- (b) the average waiting time of service targets for the first consultation and follow-up consultations;
- (c) the average duration of the first consultation and follow-up consultations attended by service targets;
- (d) the average number of consultations and consultation time span for completed cases;
- (e) the number of complaints lodged by service targets; and
- (f) the number of service targets of uncompleted cases committing suicide; and

(2) as I have learnt that while clinical psychologists need to use the "Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – Fourth Edition (Hong Kong)" to conduct intellectual assessment for children, the supplier of the Scale will sell the Scale only to members of the Division of Clinical Psychology of The Hong Kong Psychological Society, rendering clinical psychologists who are non-members but possess practising qualifications in foreign countries being unable to obtain the Scale, whether the Government has assessed if the relevant arrangement constitutes an anti-competitive conduct and how it ensures that all clinical psychologists have access to the Scale for providing service?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the questions raised by the Hon Lam Cheuk-ting is as

follows:

(1) Currently, there are clinical psychologist grade posts in the Correctional Services Department (CSD), the Department of Health (DH), the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF), the Immigration Department (ImmD), the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and the Hospital Authority (HA), providing clinical psychological service for their service targets. Statistics of clinical psychological service provided by the Government and the HA, based on the data provided by relevant departments, are set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

(a) The table below sets out the manpower of the clinical psychologist grade, broken down by full-time and part-time basis, in relevant departments and the HA as at March 31, 2018:

Department/organisation		Manpower of clinical psychologist grade	
		Full-time	Part-time
CSD	Staff members as service targets	2	0
	Persons in custody as service targets	26	0
DH		40	0
HKPF		11	0
ImmD		1	0
SWD		59 (See Note 1)	0
HA (See Note 2)		168	3

Note 1: Among the 59 clinical psychologists in the SWD, 44 were responsible for psychological casework assessment and treatment, while the others were mainly for supervision and psychological consultation in rehabilitation units.

Note 2: The manpower figures of the HA are calculated on a full-time equivalent basis, including permanent, contract and temporary staff in the HA.

(b) The table below sets out the average waiting time for the first consultation and follow-up consultations provided by the clinical psychological service of relevant departments and the HA as at March 31, 2018. Since the circumstances of each case were different, the waiting time for each case varied depending on the actual circumstances.

Department/organisation	Average waiting time	
	First consultation	Follow-up consultations

CSD	Staff members as service targets	Within 1 week	Within 1-2 weeks
	Persons in custody as service targets	3-5 working days	Within 1-2 weeks
DH		See Note 3	
HKPF		5 working days	2 weeks
ImmD		2 weeks	6-8 weeks
SWD		1-2 months (See Note 4)	3-4 weeks
HA		See Note 5	

Note 3: Service units of the DH that provide clinical psychological services (assessment and/or treatment) include the Elderly Health Services, the Families Clinics, the Student Health Service and the Child Assessment Service. While the waiting time for each case depended on the nature of the case, the average waiting time for new cases involving treatment was four to six weeks in general. In case of urgent or suspected urgent cases, the DH will accord priority and make urgent referrals according to the needs. Moreover, the individual service units would arrange follow-up consultations according to the nature of its services (and cases).

Note 4: For clinical psychological service provided by the SWD, priority was given to urgent cases, and the longest waiting time was 14 days. Very urgent cases (e.g. victims of critical incidents) could be processed on the day of referral.

Note 5: To ensure that more urgent cases are followed up promptly, allied health out-patient clinics (clinical psychological service) under the HA will arrange medical appointments for new patients based on the urgency of their clinical conditions, which is determined with regard to the patients' clinical history and presenting symptoms. The triage system groups patients into priority 1 (urgent), priority 2 (semi-urgent) and routine (stable) categories. As far as the clinical psychological service of allied health out-patient clinics is concerned, the HA strives to maintain the median waiting time for new cases in priority 1 and priority 2 categories under two weeks and eight weeks respectively. In 2017-18, the median waiting time (the 50th percentile) for the routine (stable) new case bookings at HA's allied health out-patient clinics (clinical psychological service) was 16 weeks.

(c) The table below sets out the average duration of the first consultation and follow-up consultations provided by the clinical psychological service of relevant departments in 2017-18. The duration of consultation was determined by a number of factors, such as patients' medical conditions, clinical needs and complexities involved, psychological conditions, psychological treatment programmes and their progress. Therefore, the waiting time for each case varied depending on the actual circumstances.

Department/organisation		Average duration of consultation	
		First	Follow-up
CSD	Staff members as service targets	1-2 hours	1-2 hours
	Persons in custody as service targets	1-2 hours	1-2 hours
DH		Relevant data not readily available	
HKPF		1.5 hours	1 hour
ImmD		About 2 hours	About 1.5 hours
SWD		About 2 hours (See Note 6)	About 1 hour
HA		Relevant data not readily available	

Note 6: Regarding the psychological assessments conducted by the Clinical Psychological Service of the SWD for court referral cases, the average duration of the first consultation was three to four hours.

(d) The table below sets out the average number of consultations and consultation time span for completed cases handled by the clinical psychological service of relevant departments in 2017-18. The number of consultations was determined by a number of factors, such as patients' medical conditions, clinical needs and complexities involved, psychological conditions, psychological treatment programmes and their progress. Therefore, the waiting time for each case varied depending on the actual circumstances.

Department/organisation		Completed case	
		Number of consultations	Consultation time span
CSD	Staff members as service targets	Relevant data not readily available	Over 10 hours
	Persons in custody as service targets	Relevant data not readily available	Over 4-8 hours
DH		Relevant data not readily available	
HKPF		4.5 times	About 5 hours
ImmD		About 4 times	About 6 hours
SWD		About 12 times	About 13 hours
HA		Relevant data not readily available	

Since the circumstances and complexity of each case were different, years spent on consultation services of each case varied, and relevant data is not available.

(e) The table below sets out the number of complaints received by the clinical psychological service of relevant departments in the past three financial years:

Department/organisation		Number of complaints		
		2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
CSD	Staff members as service targets	0	0	0
	Persons in custody as service targets	1	0	0
DH		0	1	2
HKPF		1	0	0
ImmD		0	0	0
SWD		2	5	6
HA		Breakdown of complaints by service type not available		

(f) The table below sets out the number of suicides in uncompleted cases known by the clinical psychological service of relevant departments in the past three financial years:

Department/organisation		Number of suicides in uncompleted cases		
		2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
CSD	Staff members as service targets	0	0	0
	Persons in custody as service targets	0	0	2
DH		Relevant data not readily available		
HKPF		0	1	3
ImmD		0	1	0
SWD		Relevant data not readily available		
HA		Relevant data not readily available		

(2) Currently, the clinical psychologist profession is not regulated by

statute. Through the introduction of a voluntary Accredited Registers Scheme for Healthcare Professions, the Government hopes to strengthen self-regulation of the profession via the enactment of code of practices to maintain the professional standards of the healthcare practitioners.

We note that the supplier of "Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – Fourth Edition (Hong Kong)" would allow eligible persons to register as registered users, among which include persons with overseas professional qualifications in clinical psychology or education psychology.

At present, the basic entry requirements for Government departments concerned and the HA for clinical psychologist posts generally refer to holding a Master Degree in Clinical Psychology from a Hong Kong university, or equivalent, and meeting the language proficiency requirements. The place of study, membership in any society or the eligibility to use a certain assessment tool are not basic entry requirements for clinical psychologist posts.