

LCQ17: Provision of services by part-time and agency nurses

Following is a question by Professor the Hon Joseph Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (May 20):

Question:

At present, the Hospital Authority (HA) recruits part-time nurses through its Locum Recruitment Website and other channels, and it also hires the services provided by nurses employed by agencies (agency nurses). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council if it knows:

(1) the respective numbers of (i) part-time nurses recruited through the Locum Recruitment Website (locum nurses), (ii) part-time nurses recruited through other channels (other part-time nurses) and (iii) agency nurses, whose services were hired by the HA during the two periods of (a) the whole of last year and (b) January to May this year, as well as the respective monthly expenses involved; set out a tabulated breakdown of such figures by hospital cluster;

(2) the respective numbers of (i) locum nurses, (ii) other part-time nurses and (iii) agency nurses, whose services will be hired by each hospital cluster in the latter half of this year as envisaged by the HA, and the respective expenses involved (set out in a table); and

(3) whether, during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic, the HA has provided the two aforesaid types of part-time nurses with sufficient protective equipment and support; if so, of the details, if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Hospital Authority (HA), I provide the following reply to the various parts of the question raised by Professor the Hon Joseph Lee.

(1) The total salary expenditure of locum nurses, part-time nurses and agency nurses incurred by the HA in 2019-20, as well as the numbers of locum nurses and part-time nurses as at March 31, 2020 are set out in the table below. As agency nurses are employed on an hourly basis, the HA is unable to provide information on the number of these nurses.

	2019-20	
	Total salary expenditure (\$ million)	Number of nurses (as at March 31, 2020)
(i) Locum nurses	50	425
(ii) Part-time nurses(excluding locum nurses)	463	4 253
(iii) Agency nurses	83	Not available

Notes:

(1) Since the establishment of the Locum Office in end-2018, the HA has recruited 560 locum nurses, of which 425 were deployed to provide services for patients in public hospitals in March 2020.

(2) Total salary expenditure of locum nurses includes basic salary and Mandatory Provident Fund.

(3) Total salary expenditure of part-time nurses (excluding locum nurses) includes basic salary, allowance, gratuity and other on-cost such as provision of home loan interest subsidy benefit.

(4) The salary expenditure above are unaudited figures. Actual figures will only be available after completion of the Annual Financial Statements.

(5) The manpower figures of the HA and relevant salary expenditure are recorded on a financial-year basis. Information on the monthly salary expenditure of locum nurses, part-time nurses and agency nurses is not readily available.

(6) The manpower figures above are calculated on a headcount basis.

(2) As it is expected that the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic will last for some time, the HA will resume services in phases, and will continue to cope with the demand for public healthcare services in the enduring fight against the epidemic which has become a new norm. Also, there will be new arrangements for medical consultation. For instance, the HA will enhance the Public-Private Partnership Programmes to divert some suitable patients from public hospitals for treatment in private hospitals.

The HA will progressively implement its plan to resume services in light of the epidemic development, and is currently unable to provide information on the estimated numbers of locum nurses, part-time nurses and agency nurses to be employed by various hospital clusters in the latter half of 2020.

(3) The HA has formulated guidelines on wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) in carrying out procedures at different levels of risk. The guidelines are applicable to all HA healthcare staff under different terms of employment. Healthcare staff are required to take suitable precautionary measures and wear appropriate PPE when working in high-risk areas or conducting high-risk procedures. Isolation facilities in hospitals and work arrangements for taking samples from patients also meet the infection control requirements. The infection control teams of individual hospitals will strengthen training for frontline staff on how to put on and take off PPE properly. The HA will continue to keep in view the supply of PPE and ensure

that frontline staff are provided with sufficient PPE when taking care of patients.