

LCQ18: Professional development of veterinary nurses and assistants

Following is a question by the Hon Benson Luk and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Miss Diane Wong, in the Legislative Council today (December 18):

Question:

According to the statistics of the Census and Statistics Department in 2018, the total number of cats and dogs kept by households in Hong Kong exceeded 400 000. It is learnt that according to the estimates of the veterinary sector, there are currently about 200 veterinary clinics in Hong Kong but only 2 000-odd veterinary nurses and assistants, with probably as many as 1 000-odd vacancies. On the other hand, Hong Kong does not currently operate any registration system for veterinary nurses and assistants, and there are views that this not only fails to ensure the quality of the profession, but also discourages aspiring persons from joining the profession as they cannot envision their career development path. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the current number of veterinary nurses and assistants in Hong Kong; whether it has assessed if the local courses currently provided for veterinary nurses can meet the needs of the profession; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether the Government has plans to increase the number of recognised courses for veterinary nurses and assistants offered by tertiary institutions or vocational and professional education and training institutions, and ultimately establish the qualification framework levels for such courses based on the Generic Level Descriptors; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether the Government has plans to establish an officially recognised registration system for veterinary nurses in the long run to enhance their professionalism and reliability, thereby improving the quality of the healthcare services of veterinary clinics and boosting the confidence of pet owners in such services; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong (VSB) is a statutory body established under the Veterinary Surgeons Registration Ordinance (Cap. 529) (the Ordinance), and is responsible for the regulation, registration and disciplinary control of veterinary surgeons. All veterinary surgeons must obtain the qualifications for registration specified under the Ordinance

before practising in Hong Kong, and should also comply with the Ordinance and Code of Practice for the Guidance of Registered Veterinary Surgeons (the Code), etc., promulgated by the VSB.

The consolidated reply of the Environment and Ecology Bureau to the question from the Hon Benson Luk is as follows:

The Ordinance stipulates that persons who are not registered veterinary surgeons (hereafter referred to as veterinary assistants) are allowed to perform certain veterinary acts on the premises of the practice, and under the direction/supervision/direct and continuous supervision of registered veterinary surgeons, but these acts do not include diagnosing, prescribing medication or performing a surgical operation. The Code also stipulates that veterinary surgeons should assess the capabilities of the person under their instruction or supervision, and ensure that the person performs the duties in an appropriate manner. The Ordinance currently does not require veterinary assistants to conduct registration or enrolment; the VSB does not maintain relevant figures.

In response to the community's concern about veterinary assistants, the VSB has set up a working group to conduct a survey on the number of veterinary assistants in Hong Kong as well as the current situation of and demand for the relevant accredited courses in veterinary nursing. The VSB will collect relevant information for further analysis, and make reference to the practices in different regions, in order to explore the feasibility of setting up a registration system for veterinary assistants (e.g. considering the setting up of a voluntary enrolment register before statutory requirements are in place). The preparatory work is currently under way and the VSB plans to commence the information collection and survey in the first half of 2025.