

LCQ19: Manpower implications of the measure to extend maternity leave

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 (January 16):

Question:

In the 2018 Policy Address she delivered on October 10 last year, the Chief Executive proposed to extend the statutory maternity leave for eligible employees from the current 10 weeks to 14 weeks. Although the relevant legislative amendments have yet to be passed by this Council, the Government and the Hospital Authority (HA) have implemented the measure to extend maternity leave for their employees since October 10 and 25 last year respectively. Regarding the manpower implications of the measure to extend maternity leave, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it has estimated the total number of nurses and allied health professionals employed by the Department of Health (DH) who will take maternity leave within this year, with a breakdown by their rank, the district in which they work and nature of their work;
- (2) whether it knows if HA has estimated the number of nurses and allied health professionals in public hospitals who will take maternity leave within this year, with a breakdown by their rank as well as by the hospital cluster, hospital and department in which they work;
- (3) whether DH and HA have employed additional staff to meet the additional manpower needs brought about by the measure to extend maternity leave; if so, of the details (including the respective numbers of additional staff members employed and the expenditures involved), and whether the additional manpower is sufficient to meet the needs; if they have not employed additional staff, the reasons for that; and
- (4) whether it knows, among the various service units (e.g. residential care homes for the elderly and residential care homes for persons with disabilities) operated by subvented social welfare organisations, the number and percentage of those which have implemented the measure to extend maternity leave; whether it has assessed the additional manpower and other resources needed by such units for implementing the measure; whether it will allocate additional resources to such organisations, so that they can implement the measure expeditiously; if so, of the details, if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Labour and Welfare Bureau, the Department of Health (DH) and the Hospital Authority (HA), my reply to the various parts of the question raised by Professor the Hon Joseph Lee is as follows:

(1) As at January 7, 2019, a total of 65 nurses and allied health professionals in DH have reported their delivery or expected confinement dates on or after October 10, 2018. They could have maternity leave (ML) for 14 weeks. The grades and services involved are set out in the table below:

	Centre for Health Protection	Regulatory Affairs and Health Services	Dental Service	Total
Medical and Health Officer Grade	3	7	0	10
Dental Officer Grade	0	0	3	3
Nursing Grades	14	24	0	38
Supplementary Medical Grades	1	5	0	6
Para-dental Grades	0	0	8	8
Total	18	36	11	65

DH does not separately estimate the total number of nurses and allied health professionals who will take ML in 2019.

(2) and (3) According to the statistics of HA, about 1 000 staff members have been granted statutory ML each year, of which around 60 per cent of them are nurses and allied health professionals. In the event that the implementation of the extension of ML to 14 weeks leads to tight manpower, the departments concerned will make appropriate arrangements having regard to the actual operational needs, such as through the Special Honorarium Scheme or employment of temporary staff to increase manpower so as to ensure that medical services will not be affected.

DH has not recruited additional staff for the extension of ML. Usually, the workload of staff on ML is shared out amongst other existing staff. However, if individual service units in DH experience difficulties in sharing out the workload, their respective Service Heads may consider engaging part-time contract staff on a temporary basis under established mechanism.

(4) The Government proposes to extend the statutory ML from the current 10 weeks to 14 weeks. The Government hopes to introduce into the Legislative Council a bill to amend the Employment Ordinance (EO) in late 2019, and implement the extension of statutory ML two years after the passage of the

relevant legislation. The cost of the additional ML pay would then be funded by the Government by way of reimbursement to the employers in accordance with the arrangements under the amended EO. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) understands that some non-governmental welfare organisations (NGOs) have already on their own extended the ML of their female employees from 10 weeks to 14 weeks according to their human resource policies and capabilities. However, the SWD does not have information on the number of these NGOs/service units or details of their relevant arrangements.