

LCQ6: Licensing examination for non-locally trained medical graduates

Following is a question by the Hon Tommy Cheung and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (October 20):

Question:

Except for the medical graduates of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong, all medical graduates who wish to register with the Medical Council of Hong Kong (MCHK) for obtaining the qualification of medical practitioners are required to pass the licensing examination (LE) administered by the MCHK and complete a period of assessment in approved hospitals or healthcare institutions before they may be fully registered. Due to the epidemic, the MCHK cancelled a total of two written examinations and three clinical examinations last year and this year, and the capacity for candidates of the clinical examinations of various disciplines to be held next month has also been reduced from the original 72 to 60 or less than 72. There are comments that such arrangements have impacted on the supply of medical practitioners. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) if it has gained an understanding of whether the MCHK considered factors other than the epidemic in making the aforesaid decision to reduce the capacity for candidates; if so, of the details;

(2) whether the Government will encourage the MCHK to make reference to the relevant practices adopted by the two aforesaid universities when they held graduation examinations respectively for some 200-odd medical students in the middle of this year and take appropriate anti-epidemic measures for clinical examinations, so that such examinations can have a capacity for candidates comparable to that in the past; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) of the measures in place to assist the MCHK in expediting the holding of the LE and increasing the number of LE sittings, so as to offset the reduction in the supply of medical practitioners due to the cancellation of examinations since 2020?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been adopting a multi-pronged approach to address the shortage of doctors in our healthcare system. Apart from continuously increasing the number of locally-trained doctors, the Government has also been actively seeking to attract qualified non-locally trained doctors to

practise in Hong Kong through various means, including improving the arrangements for the Licensing Examination (LE), enhancing the attractiveness of limited registration and amending the Medical Registration Ordinance (Cap. 161) to create a new pathway for qualified non-locally trained doctors to obtain full registration in Hong Kong as an alternative to the current pathway of passing the LE, subject to certain criteria being met.

As a statutory professional regulatory body, the Medical Council of Hong Kong (MCHK) acts in accordance with its functions under the law. Insofar as the LE is concerned, the MCHK has implemented over the past few years a number of improvements and new initiatives to assist qualified non-locally trained doctors to obtain full registration in Hong Kong whilst upholding the professional standards, including increasing the frequency of the LE from once to twice a year, revising certain exemption requirements for the LE, introducing a Virtual Education Resource Centre to enhance the transparency of the LE, improving the design of examination questions as well as abolishing the negative marking mechanism.

My consolidated reply to the questions raised by the Hon Tommy Cheung is as follows:

According to the information provided by the MCHK, the LE is currently held twice annually, and comprises three parts, namely Part I – The Examination in Professional Knowledge, Part II – The Proficiency Test in Medical English and Part III – The Clinical Examination. There are four disciplines under Part III – The Clinical Examination, i.e. Medicine, Surgery, Obstetrics and Gynaecology and Paediatrics.

It is understood that, in view of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic, the MCHK decided earlier to cancel the two LEs (Part I to Part III) scheduled for 2020 and Part III – The Clinical Examination of the LE (First Sitting) scheduled for May 2021. Having regard to the latest development of the epidemic and given the need to safeguard public health and safety and to maintain the normal operation of the LE, the MCHK held Part I – The Examination in Professional Knowledge and Part II – The Proficiency Test in Medical English of the 2021 LEs in March and September 2021.

For Part III – The Clinical Examination of the 2021 LE (Second Sitting), it will be held between late November and early December 2021. To safeguard the health and safety of candidates, invigilators and other staff, with reference to the infection control measures adopted for the medical graduation examinations of the University of Hong Kong and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the MCHK will take appropriate preventive measures, such as the setting up of examination venues, COVID-19 testing and health declaration by candidates, etc.

Regarding the quota for Part III – The Clinical Examination, according to the current guidelines of the MCHK, the maximum capacity for each of the four disciplines is 72 candidates per sitting. In the light of the increase in examination time for each candidate brought about by the latest changes to the format of the Paediatrics Clinical Examination and the series of

infection control measures introduced in response to the COVID-19 epidemic, the number of seats for the Paediatrics Clinical Examination of the 2021 LE (Second Sitting) will be adjusted from 72 to 60, while that for each of the other three disciplines will remain unchanged. If the number of applicants exceeds the maximum capacity, the MCHK will allocate the seats in accordance with the prevailing mechanism.

The above-mentioned special arrangement on the capacity for candidates of the Paediatrics Clinical Examination will only apply to the 2021 LE (Second Sitting). The MCHK will consider later on the capacity arrangement for Part III – The Clinical Examination next year, in the light of the experience with the Paediatrics Clinical Examination under the revised format in the 2021 LE (Second Sitting), the latest epidemic situation and relevant infection control measures.

The Government will maintain close liaison with the MCHK to ensure that it will continue to conduct the LEs for qualified non-locally trained doctors to obtain full registration in Hong Kong, taking into account the need to maintain public health and safety as well as the smooth operation of the LE.