

Speech by SFH at gathering with Hong Kong community and healthcare professionals in Melbourne (English only) (with photos)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, at a gathering with members of the Hong Kong community and healthcare professionals in Melbourne, Australia, today (September 16):

Good evening everyone. It gives me great pleasure to join you at this occasion.

With the concerted efforts of the Government and our healthcare professionals, Hong Kong has over the years established an efficient dual-tracked healthcare system of very high standard. Our impressive healthcare indicators in life expectancy and infant mortality bear testimony to this. With the public healthcare system being the safety net, we are to ensure that nobody will be denied healthcare service due to lack of means. For those who wish and are able to afford, they can choose more personalised healthcare services in the private sector, which has a sizeable presence in the delivery of healthcare services and is the chief provider of ambulatory care in Hong Kong.

Nonetheless, as in other developed economies, many challenges lie ahead of Hong Kong's healthcare system, amongst which a fast ageing population and the exponential increase in the demand of public healthcare services are the most imminent ones.

The Government published the report of the Strategic Review on Healthcare Manpower Planning and Professional Development in June 2017, setting out 10 recommendations to lay the foundation for healthcare manpower planning and the direction for professional development and regulation of healthcare professionals, with a view to ensuring that there are qualified healthcare professionals to support the healthy and sustainable development of the healthcare system in Hong Kong.

As stated in the Strategic Review, there is a general shortage of doctors, dentists, dental hygienists, general nurses, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, medical laboratory technologists, optometrists and radiographers.

Hence, the Government has substantially increased the number of healthcare-related training places by about 60 per cent (from about 1 150 to about 1 800) in the past decade. The Government will further increase the number of healthcare-related publicly funded first-degree intake places by over 150 from about 1 780 to 1 930 (including 60 medical, 60 nursing, and

some 30 dental and allied health professionals) in the next three years.

As stated in the Strategic Review, locally trained healthcare professionals should continue to be the bedrock of our healthcare workforce. Meanwhile, locally trained manpower should be supplemented as necessary by qualified, non-locally trained ones through established mechanism in the short term.

Hong Kong is now in general shortage of healthcare professionals and we welcome qualified healthcare professionals to join us. You will find there is abundant opportunities for treatment and training even for complex and rare medical cases. So, this is the reason why we are here – to promote and publicise the registration arrangements overseas to facilitate the practice of qualified non-locally trained healthcare professionals in Hong Kong.

Presently, there are avenues for non-locally trained healthcare professionals to practise in Hong Kong. For doctors and nurses, full registration is granted to non-locally trained professionals through licensing examinations. The Medical Council of Hong Kong and the Nursing Council of Hong Kong have increased the frequency of licensing examinations and, where appropriate, introduced more flexibility for internship arrangement.

For physiotherapists and occupational therapists, non-locally trained professionals could gain full registration without licensing examination through recognised qualifications in general.

Today, we are happy to have representatives from the Hospital Authority, the Social Welfare Department and several NGOs to share with you more about the job opportunities for non-locally trained healthcare professionals in Hong Kong. You are promised plenty of development opportunities for a career in the healthcare arena in Hong Kong. I encourage you and your friends to seriously consider to start your career in Hong Kong.

I wish you all a fruitful evening. Thank you!

