

Government responds to an online article on “Medical Registration (Amendment) Bill 2021”

Regarding a recent unfounded online commentary on the "Medical Registration (Amendment) Bill 2021" (the Bill), the Government clarified as follows:

(1) The Bill does not intend to pave way for the introduction of Mainland doctors

The Government has repeatedly emphasised that those who wish to become a doctor with special registration must be a Hong Kong permanent resident. The purpose of the Bill is to attract Hong Kong permanent residents, who are doctors in any place outside Hong Kong, to return to Hong Kong and serve in the public healthcare sector.

(2) Licensing Examination is not the only way to assess the quality of doctors, and non-locally trained Hong Kong doctors are subject to multiple supervisions

At present, many countries in the world (such as Singapore and Australia) have different mechanisms to attract non-locally trained doctors. Subject to fulfillment of certain criteria, non-locally trained doctors will be granted full registration in the respective countries. Passing the examinations is not the only condition for obtaining full registration. The Government reiterated that the amendment of the Ordinance is not intended to abolish the current licensing examination system, but to create a new pathway for qualified non-locally trained doctors to practise in the public healthcare sector of Hong Kong on the premise of ensuring the quality of doctors.

In fact, doctors with special registration are subject to multiple supervisions to ensure quality, including:

- (a) he/she holds a recognised medical qualification awarded by a non-local medical school and possesses medical registration in any place where the non-local medical schools concerned are located;
- (b) for those who already have a specialist qualification, their medical qualifications must be recognised by the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine (HKAM) as equivalent to a local specialist qualification;
- (c) for those who have yet to obtain a specialist qualification, he/she must complete or continue his/her specialist training in Hong Kong. HKAM and its constituent specialty Colleges will monitor their performance before awarding specialist qualifications; and
- (d) he/she has to work in public healthcare institutions for at least five years after obtaining specialist qualification and must undergo continuous on-the-job assessments to ensure that he/she performs well and is capable to

be a doctor.

In comparison, locally trained doctors can obtain full registration after completing the internship. The Government is actually imposing a higher requirement on non-locally trained doctors.

(3) The current registration system is ineffective, causing the number of non-locally trained doctors to drop significantly

Before September 1996, non-locally trained doctors were an important source of the doctor supply. After that, all non-locally trained doctors are required to pass the Licensing Examination administered by the Medical Council of Hong Kong (Medical Council) and complete a specified period of assessment before they can be registered with full registration for practising in Hong Kong. As a result, the proportion of newly registered doctors with non-local medical qualifications dropped significantly from an average of 56 per cent for the five years between 1992 and 1996 to an average of 13 per cent for the five years between 2015 and 2019.

The reasons for the small numbers of doctors qualified to practise in Hong Kong through the Licensing Examination route are manifold but the hurdles presented by the Licensing Examination are obvious. On the other hand, while non-locally trained doctors may be admitted under the limited registration scheme to practise in Hong Kong, the uncertainty associated with renewal of registration every three years and the restriction to work in a specified institution are obviously disincentives.

(4) The Bill does not bypass the Medical Council

The Government respects the Medical Council's statutory function to regulate doctors. Taking into account that the Medical Council is a major stakeholder in the medical profession, the Government proposed to establish the Special Registration Committee, which will determine the list of recognised medical qualifications, under the Medical Council. Also, the committee will comprise, among others, four representatives from the Medical Council, including the Chairman of the Medical Council and three other members. Non-locally trained doctors who will practise in Hong Kong through the new pathway will still need to register under the Medical Council and will be subject to its disciplinary regulation like other local doctors.

(5) The Government is actively strengthening public medical services via various measures

The Government reckons that the public healthcare system is facing many challenges, with manpower of doctors being one of them. Some structural problems would need to be dealt with separately to improve public healthcare services. In fact, the Government is actively enhancing public healthcare services through various measures, including promoting public-private partnership so as to tap into the capacity of the private healthcare sector, thereby alleviating the pressure on the public healthcare sector; and promoting primary healthcare and strengthening co-ordination among various professions, sectors and organisations in the primary healthcare area with a

view to alleviating the pressure on public hospitals.

The Government plans to submit the Bill to the Legislative Council for deliberation on June 2. To cope with challenges in healthcare services in relation to the growing and ageing population, the Government hopes that members of the Legislative Council and the community could support the Bill so that more non-locally trained Hong Kong doctors can return and serve the Hong Kong community.