

LCQ12: Licensing Examination of Medical Council of Hong Kong

Following is a question by the Hon Kingsley Wong and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Health, Dr Libby Lee, in the Legislative Council today (May 21):

Question:

There are views that the content of the Licensing Examination (LE) administered by the Medical Council of Hong Kong (MCHK) is too difficult and its syllabus far exceeds clinical needs, resulting in low pass rates. However, there are also views pointing out that despite its high level of difficulty, LE can ensure that passing candidates are capable of coping with the medical environment in Hong Kong. In addition, a member of the public has relayed to me that he had requested past LE examination papers and the relevant examination information from the Department of Health (DH), but DH pointed out that such information was in the possession of MCHK, which refused to disclose it. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has studied if the authorities have the power to access or require MCHK to submit and disclose information, including the examination papers and marking criteria of LE; whether DH has reviewed the LE examination papers and kept full records of the relevant examination materials; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as there have been criticisms that the inclusion of a large number of questions on specialties and rare diseases in LE is a deliberate attempt to create difficulties for overseas candidates, how the authorities ensure that the difficulty of LE examination papers is at a reasonable level while respecting the professional autonomy of MCHK; whether the Director of Health or his/her representative, as an ex officio member of MCHK, has participated in the design of LE examination papers, including giving opinions on the scope and questions of the examination; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) as there are views that MCHK's non-disclosure of past LE examination papers undermines candidates' learning and makes it difficult for the community to fairly assess the difficulty of the examination papers, whether the authorities and MCHK will explore the disclosure or restricted disclosure of past LE examination papers; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) as there are views pointing out that the "Useful Resources" on MCHK's current website are too simplistic and the number of "Sample Questions" available is insufficient, whether it knows if MCHK will enhance its website and introduce measures to further facilitate overseas candidates in preparing for LE?

Reply:

President,

In response to the questions raised by the Hon Kingsley Wong, after consulting the Medical Council of Hong Kong (MCHK), the consolidated reply is set out below.

The registration and examination of healthcare professionals are matters pertaining to the professional standard and conduct of the sector. Their regulation is administered by the statutory boards or councils of the professions. The regulatory authorities must be accountable to the public when discharging their duties, ensuring Hong Kong's medical professional standard while protecting the health of citizens and safeguarding the overall interest of society. The Government's role is to ensure, through effective administrative arrangements, that the boards and councils of the respective professions perform their regulatory duties in accordance with their statutory functions and powers.

The MCHK is an independent statutory body established under the Medical Registration Ordinance (MRO) (Cap. 161) empowered to handle registration and disciplinary regulation of medical practitioners in Hong Kong. Section 7 of the MRO provides that the MCHK shall set a Licensing Examination (LE), the passing of which shows the achievement of a standard acceptable for registration as a medical practitioner. The conduct of LE by the MCHK aims to ensure that those who wish to register as medical practitioners in Hong Kong after having received medical training elsewhere have attained a professional standard comparable to that of the local medical graduates, thereby safeguarding the quality of healthcare services and public health. The MCHK will regularly review the contents of the LE, and provides information to enable non-locally trained doctors who intend to sit for the LE to understand the format and contents of the LE.

The LE consists of three parts: namely Part I Examination in Professional Knowledge, Part II Proficiency Test in Medical English and Part III Clinical Examination. The MCHK adopts a number of measures in organising the LE to ensure that its level and assessment standards are comparable to those of the medical examinations of the two universities in Hong Kong. Among them, the MCHK has set up different sub-committees responsible for matters related to the LE, including organising the LE, approving examination questions and maintaining a database of examination questions, considering and deciding on the eligibility of applicants to sit for the LE, and processing candidates' applications for review. To ensure representativeness, the sub-committees include representatives from public and private healthcare institutions, the medical schools and the Department of Health. In addition, the two medical schools in Hong Kong will appoint local and non-local medical experts with profound knowledge in relevant disciplines as examiners for each part of the LE to ensure that the quality and level of the examination meet the requirements. These experts will also offer recommendations to further refine the examination contents and arrangements. For Part I Examination in Professional Knowledge, the questions are chosen from the database of examination questions at comparable level as the medical examination of the

two medical schools, hence not suitable for publication.

To enhance the transparency of the LE and to increase candidates' understanding of the LE, the MCHK set up an information portal on the LE in October 2018 (leip.mchk.org.hk). Relevant information of the LE, such as examination formats, sample questions, list of suggested readings, videos of the Clinical Examination and general information about the LE, is available in the LE Information Portal for reference by the public and non-locally trained doctors who intend to seek registration as medical practitioners in Hong Kong. The MCHK reviews and enhances the online portal from time to time, including increasing the number of sample questions, to facilitate candidates in preparing for the LE.