

LCQ17: Accredited Registers Scheme for Healthcare Professions

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

Question:

Launched by the Government in late 2016, the Pilot Accredited Registers Scheme for Healthcare Professions (the Scheme) aims to enhance the current society-based registration arrangement of healthcare professions under the principle of professional autonomy, and ensure the professional competency of relevant healthcare professionals. However, there are views pointing out that the implementation of the Scheme has been slow and lacks transparency. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Government will assess the effectiveness of the Scheme and submit reports on the Scheme; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether the Government will provide professional bodies intending to apply for the Scheme with specific reference materials on accreditation applications to enhance the fairness and transparency of the Scheme; if so, of the details (including the timetable); if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether the Government will establish a formal appeal channel or re-application mechanism for the Scheme, and explain the reasons to professional bodies whose applications are rejected, and proactively assist them in improving their standards in order to meet the accreditation requirements in future; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) as the Government has indicated that the Scheme will serve a basis for it to study how to formulate a statutory registration regime for relevant accredited professions, of the progress and timetable of the relevant work; and

(5) as it is learnt that the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care of the United Kingdom has categorised certain types of psychologists (e.g. counselling psychologists, clinical psychologists, and educational psychologists) into one profession (i.e. "Practitioner Psychologists") and established a registration system for them, whether the Government will consider drawing on such practice and standardise the categorisation of local psychologists as practitioner psychologists for professional registration?

Reply:

President,

The Government introduced the Pilot Accredited Registers Scheme for Healthcare Professions (AR Scheme) in end-2016 to optimise the society-based registration regulatory regime, ensure professional standards of healthcare professionals and enhance information transparency, thereby facilitating the selection of qualified service providers by the public. The Jockey Club School of Public Health and Primary Care of the Chinese University of Hong Kong has been appointed as the Accreditation Agent of the AR Scheme to carry out accreditation procedures for participating healthcare professional bodies. Relevant healthcare professional bodies will only be granted accreditation status upon passing the accreditation assessment.

The reply in response to the question raised by Dr the Hon Tik Chi-yuen is as follows:

(1) to (3)

AR Scheme

The AR Scheme is operated according to the principle of "One Profession, One Professional Body, One Register". To ensure effective governance structures in professional bodies and professional standards of their members, the Accreditation Agent has established accreditation standards to be met by professional bodies on: (1) governance, (2) operational effectiveness, (3) standards for registrants, (4) educational and training requirements, and (5) management of the register. The Accreditation Agent will review the accreditation standards from time to time, taking into consideration relevant researches, evidence, policies, regulations and developments in healthcare professions, and consult relevant stakeholders. Accreditation standards of the AR Scheme are publicly available information and are published on the Scheme's dedicated website. As specified in the publicly available information, if an applying professional body disagrees with the Accreditation Agent's decision regarding its application for accreditation and can demonstrate that there are grounds for appeal, it may submit an appeal to the Appeal Board of the AR Scheme. After making a determination on the appeal, the Appeal Board will provide the applying body with a response explaining the reasons for its determination.

The AR Scheme accepted applications from late December 2016 to mid-February 2017, during which applications were received from a total of 15 healthcare professions. After assessment of the applications, the Accreditation Agent determined that five healthcare professions met the eligibility criteria to undergo the accreditation process of the Pilot Scheme, namely speech therapists, clinical psychologists, educational psychologists, audiologists, and dietitians. Since 2018, one professional body from each of the five healthcare professions has passed the accreditation assessment and was granted full accreditation status. The five accredited professional bodies have already passed the accreditation assessment in two accreditation cycles. The Accreditation Agent has commenced a review on the effectiveness of the first accreditation cycle and will make recommendations on how to enhance the AR Scheme and the way forward. It will soon finalise the final report for submission to the Government. Preliminarily, the Accreditation Agent affirms that the AR Scheme has been

operating smoothly in general and has achieved the objective of ensuring professional standards of healthcare professionals, while enabling members of the public to make decisions in choosing healthcare services by providing them with more information.

Considering the development of the other healthcare professions, the Government will continue to make reference to the review and recommendations of the Accreditation Agent in driving forward the AR Scheme. The Government has no plan at present to further expand the scope of professions covered by the Scheme.

(4) and (5) In general, modes of regulation of healthcare professionals include mandatory statutory registration regime, registration under accredited schemes and voluntary registration under a society-based arrangement. These modes of regulation have different levels of regulation on professions. A mandatory statutory registration regime is not the only effective mode of regulation, nor is it applicable to the actual situation of all healthcare professions.

The Government's policy on the regulation approach for healthcare professions is to adopt a risk-based approach in determining the most suitable mode of regulation applicable to an individual healthcare profession, based on the level of risk posed on public health, healthcare quality and public safety when providing services. In general, the Government will prioritise the implementation of mandatory statutory registration regimes for healthcare professionals involved in medical procedures which are invasive or of a higher risk. At the same time, the Government will also maintain communication with the professions and adopt appropriate modes of regulation taking into consideration the actual situation of the development of various healthcare professions.

The purpose of introducing the AR Scheme is to encourage individual healthcare professions to implement a voluntary registration arrangement under the principle of professional autonomy, so as to enhance the representativeness of healthcare professional bodies, forge consensus and promote professional development. Accredited bodies should focus on strengthening the promotion of their accreditation status and enhancing their professional representation in order to attract more healthcare professionals to apply for registration. Under the risk-based approach, the Government has no plan at present to legislate in respect of the relevant healthcare professions to set up statutory registration regimes.