



HONG KONG PHYSIOTHERAPY ASSOCIATION LIMITED

香港物理治療學會有限公司

中國香港特別行政區 九龍佐敦德輔街12號維富中心9樓901室
Room 901, 9/F Rightful Centre, 12 Tak Hing Street, Jordan, Kowloon, HKSAR
www.hongkongpa.com.hk Tel: (852) 2336 0172 Fax: (852) 2338 0252

2021 Policy Address Consultation: Views from the Hong Kong Physiotherapy Association

The Hong Kong Physiotherapy Association (“Association”) is pleased that the Government has launched the public consultation to gather views and suggestions from different sectors on the coming Policy Address. Our Association would like to raise the following issues for the Government’s consideration.

1. Primary Healthcare Development

Because of the rapidly ageing population, age-related chronic conditions will continue to pose a substantial threat to public health. The Government’s initiative to promote primary healthcare through establishing District Health Centres (DHC) is certainly timely. The key functions of DHCs include health promotion, disease prevention and screening, chronic disease management and community rehabilitation.

Physiotherapists, with their education and training background, are well equipped to carry out ALL the above key functions of DHCs. As physical inactivity is a risk factor for many of the chronic diseases, proper individualized advice on physical activity and exercise prescription is important. Physiotherapists are experts in maximizing functioning in persons with disabilities, and the same knowledge and skill sets can help optimize the health status of persons without disabilities. This is particularly important in an aging population with increasing life expectancy and an anticipated escalation of co-morbidities. In regard to tertiary prevention, life-altering impact, complications, relapse and recurrent attacks are common in people with stroke, heart disease, hip fracture or musculoskeletal conditions, who are the main target client groups of DHCs. Restoration of mobility and function is often rated as the top rehabilitation goal by persons suffering from these conditions. Physiotherapists’ expertise is crucial in tertiary prevention.

In light of this, the manpower provision of physiotherapists in DHCs and DHC Express (DHCEs) should be increased. Currently, physiotherapist is not even a mandatory staff requirement in DHCEs. To attract more physiotherapists to work in the primary healthcare settings, there should also be a clear career pathway. **Our Association recommends increasing mandatory physiotherapist provision and fostering a more promising career prospect for physiotherapists in both DHCs and DHCEs, in order to provide the clients with adequate centre-based preventive physiotherapy services. In addition, it should not be left to the hands of individual DHC(E) operators to design the ranks of physiotherapists in each DHC(E).**

As the current healthcare policy encourages healthcare professionals to be more proactive in promoting ill-health prevention, this calls for a knowledge-attitude-behaviour health education model together with health risk factors screening, and chronic disease management. Although physiotherapists are fully capable of providing these services, **our Association advocates for creating specialty training programmes in primary healthcare among the local physiotherapy education institutions to support continuing development and growth of preventive physiotherapy in Hong Kong.**

2. Sports Development

Our Association is very pleased that our Hong Kong athletes have achieved such outstanding results in the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics. **Physiotherapists play a key role in supporting athletes in different aspects, including sports injury analysis, prevention, management, rehabilitation, and sports performance enhancement. In fact, physiotherapists made up the largest single group of healthcare professionals at the Tokyo Olympics.**

Similarly, physiotherapists in the subvented sector play a key role in the initial screening and empowerment of potential disabled athletes while adaptive sports are important areas of pursuit for persons with disabilities. Specially-trained physiotherapists assist in the classification of disabled athletes in international events. So we welcome any measures that would enhance development of sports science research, provision of physiotherapy services to athletes, and development and advocacy of adaptive sports in Hong Kong.

We are definitely encouraged by the recent developments that the Government will be implementing different measures to boost sports development. **Apart from building new facilities, we also advocate for increasing funding to support sports science and rehabilitation research, and to create more physiotherapist positions so that more athletes can receive timely physiotherapy services.** There has been plenty of news coverage recently reporting inadequate physiotherapy services for Hong Kong athletes. Approximately 40% of registered physiotherapists in Hong Kong are working in the private sector, and they are fully capable of providing expert service to athletes. **The Government should explore the possibility of collaborating with the private sector so that our athletes can receive quality and timely physiotherapy service, thereby enhancing their level of performance in competitions.**

3. Supply and retention of physiotherapists

According to the recent commissioned study on Healthcare Manpower Projections, there will be an estimated **shortfall of 276 and 487 physiotherapists by the year of 2030 and 2040, respectively.** To ensure we provide adequate physiotherapy services to the athletes and the public in general, there is a need to increase the supply of physiotherapists. Thus, **the**

Government should inject more funding into increasing the quota for physiotherapy student numbers. Increasing space provision for teaching and learning is also essential.

Another issue related to physiotherapy manpower is staff retention. The Government also needs to consider different strategies to recognise the excellent professional services provided by physiotherapists, so as to achieve better staff retention.

Manpower survey conducted by the Department of Health clearly revealed that the proportion of physiotherapists serving in the Hospital Authority dropped drastically from 77% since its launching in 1992 to 38% in 2017 while those serving in the subvented sector dropped significantly from 36% in 1987 to 19% in 2017. On the other hand, the proportion of physiotherapists working in the private sector raised from less than 10% in 1987 to approaching 40% in 2017. **Retention of physiotherapists in the public sector is of top priority in addition to increasing the supply.**

One of the key issues that remains unresolved is the pay scale of physiotherapists. In the qualification grouping system, physiotherapists are classified under Qualification Group (QG) 3 Group I (i.e., Higher Diploma or Associate Degree Grades), with a starting salary at point 14 on the Master Pay Scale (MPS) for Physiotherapist II. However, the entry-level education of physiotherapists has been upgraded to the bachelor degree level for more than 20 years. A Master entry-level physiotherapy programme has also been implemented since 2011 in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. According to the Manpower Survey conducted by the Department of Health, close to 70% of physiotherapists hold Bachelor's Degree as their earliest basic qualifications. However, the MPS has not been adjusted to reflect this change in physiotherapy training even to this day. **Our Association strongly recommends that the MPS be adjusted so that the starting salary point for physiotherapists is in line with that for a bachelor degree holder (i.e., point 16 for Physiotherapist II).**

Another feasible strategy to promote staff retention is to provide better career prospects for physiotherapists. **Our Association strongly recommends the creation of Specialised or Advanced Practice Physiotherapist positions in Hospital Authority and Department of Health with an increment increase in salary,** so that experienced physiotherapists with advanced practice skills can have formal recognition of their expertise. **Similarly, there should be an establishment of a standard ratio of Senior Physiotherapist in the subvented sector.** These physiotherapists, if successfully retained, can play a major role in new clinical service development, thereby benefiting more people in need.