



HONG KONG PHYSIOTHERAPY ASSOCIATION LIMITED

香港物理治療學會有限公司

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Mr. Henry FAN Hung-ling, SBS, JP
Chairman,
Hospital Authority
Hospital Authority Building, 147B Argyle Street,
Kowloon, Hong Kong

29 December 2021

Re: The new round of staff retention measures in Hospital Authority

Dear Mr. Fan,

The Hong Kong Physiotherapy Association (HKPA) is aware that the Hospital Authority (HA) Board has recently approved and announced a new round of staff retention measures that target the relatively younger employees, including the implementation of a low-interest home loan scheme, and increasing the promotion posts for doctors and nurses. While these initiatives may provide incentives for younger staff members to stay in HA, **we express our dismay that there are no promotion measures targeting the allied health staff, including physiotherapists.**

Based on feedback from HA colleagues, **the attrition rate of physiotherapy staff is more severe than that of doctors and nurses, at around 10%.** The high attrition rate occurs across all ranks of physiotherapist staff. Despite the shortage of manpower, the staff feel anxious to maintain the productivity level and quality service as achieved last year. As a result, additional workload is borne by existing staff. The workload has reached to almost an intolerable level for many. This situation, if not rectified in a timely manner, will certainly be detrimental to staff wellbeing and service quality.

Our Association had already sent a letter to your good self and the Secretary of the Allied Health Professions SGCC (AHP SGCC) dated 1 November 2021 expressing our concerns with the high attrition rate of physiotherapist staff and the lack of measures to retain both the younger and more experienced physiotherapist employees. In the same letter, we had made several recommendations, including the provision of an allowance to eligible physiotherapists similar to the Specialty Nurse Allowance, the creation of more promotion posts with increment in salary, and allowing retired senior physiotherapists to keep the same rank upon re-joining HA. **However, the high attrition rate of HA physiotherapists was completely ignored in the HA news release dated 16 December 2021, as if the increase in attrition was only a problem for doctors and nurses. Physiotherapists have long made significant contributions to the development and delivery of healthcare services in HA. Regrettably, while there are multiple measures to tackle the high attrition rate of doctors and nurses, physiotherapist staff are again left out of the picture completely, as the new round of staff retention measures is announced.**

Physiotherapist staff in HA have already been treated unfairly for long. For example, both the starting and end point salaries of physiotherapists are lower than those of speech therapists and dieticians, because physiotherapists are still being classified under Qualification Group (QG) 3 Group I (i.e., Higher Diploma or Associate Degree Grades). However, the entry-level education of physiotherapists has been upgraded to the bachelor degree level for more than 20 years. However, the Master Pay Scale has not been adjusted to reflect this change in physiotherapy training even to this day. The salary level offered by HA is simply not competitive enough compared with the private market.

Another example is the difficulty faced when creating additional senior posts in the annual plan bidding exercise. Based on the feedback from HA colleagues, creating additional Senior Physiotherapist posts is extremely difficult. Having a tight budget is often given by Senior Management of HA as the reason for rejecting the idea of creating additional Senior Physiotherapist posts. In recent years, most of the newly created senior AH posts were established through upgrading from the existing AH I posts. It is in stark contrast to the treatment received by doctors and nurses, who will benefit from the new round of staff retention measures. According to the HA news release dated 16 December 2021, there will be a great increase in number of promotion posts for doctors and nurses from creation of new posts and rank. These initiatives undoubtedly require additional fiscal resources, but it seems that fiscal constraint is no longer an issue when it comes to promoting staff retention among doctors and nurses.

Finally, the management allowance provided to Physiotherapy Department managers is lower than that given to their counterparts in Clinical Psychology, although the number of staff managed by the former are far greater.

The above are just a few examples of how HA physiotherapist staff are not being treated the way they deserve. Despite the unfair system, physiotherapist staff have always dedicated themselves to providing high quality patient care throughout the years. Unfortunately, it is apparent that the management of HA only pays lip service to the contribution of physiotherapist staff, without implementing tangible measures for promoting their morale and retaining them, even as the staff attrition has now reached an alarming rate.

We strongly recommend that the Management of HA formulate and implement timely and appropriate staff retention measures targeting physiotherapist employees. Our suggestions are summarised below, some of which had already been described in our letter dated 1 November 2021:

1. Provide an allowance to eligible physiotherapists, similar to Specialty Nurse Allowance (SNA);
2. Create an alternative promotion pathway with addition of Specialised or Advanced Practice Physiotherapist positions;
3. Allow additional Senior Physiotherapist posts in 2023/24 annual plan exercise;
4. Allow retired Senior Physiotherapists to keep the same rank when they re-join HA;
5. Increase the number of supporting staff (the existing standard is 1 PT: 0.55 supporting staff);
6. Provide additional allowance (e.g., hardship allowance) for physiotherapists in departments where the attrition rate reaches an alarming level; and
7. Increase the amount of management allowance provided to Physiotherapy Department managers.

Thank you for your attention on the above matters, and I hope that HA would seriously look into the issues surrounding the high attrition rate of physiotherapist employees and implement appropriate measures accordingly.

Yours Sincerely,



Prof. Marco Pang
President,
Hong Kong Physiotherapy Association

cc: Prof. Sophia CHAN Siu-chee, JP (Secretary for Food and Health of the Government of the Hong Kong SAR)
Dr. Tony KO Pat-Sing (Chief Executive of Hospital Authority)
Ms. Fion YEUNG (Secretary of AHP SGCC)