



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部食物及衛生局
Food and Health Bureau, Government Secretariat
The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

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Prof Agnes TIWARI
Chairman
Nursing Council of Hong Kong
17/F, Wu Chung House
213 Queen's Road East
Wanchai, Hong Kong

Dear Aggie,

Specialisation of Nursing Practice

I write to invite the Nursing Council of Hong Kong ("NCHK") to formulate a voluntary scheme on advanced/ specialised nursing practice with a view to advancing the professional competence of nurses in Hong Kong and paving the way for setting up a statutory regime of advanced/ specialised nursing practice in the long run.

The Government recognises the pivotal role played by nurses in contributing to our healthcare system through advanced nursing practice and enhanced clinical specialties. In 2016, the Government set up a Task Force on Specialisation of Nursing Practice ("the Task Force"), comprising key stakeholders in the nursing profession. The Task Force aims to study the applicability and practicability of introducing specialisation of nursing practice in Hong Kong, with the ultimate goal of putting in place a legal framework on nursing specialisation in the long run.

NCHK is the statutory authority of the nursing profession in Hong Kong performing the role of enrolment and registration of nurses, accreditation of training institutions and courses, as well as the administration of voluntary continuous nursing education. At the 2nd Task Force meeting held on 12 January 2018, it was agreed that the Government should invite NCHK to formulate a voluntary scheme which could help advance the professional competence of nurses in Hong Kong and pave the way for setting up of a statutory regime for advanced/specialised nursing practice in the long run. The voluntary scheme should include, among others -

- (a) prescribing guidelines on the scope of practice and/or core competencies of nurses with advanced expertise and standards;
- (b) devising a mechanism by setting training standards and recognising training institutes; and
- (c) exploring the feasibility of setting up a mechanism for advanced/ specialised practice register under NCHK.

We encourage NCHK to work with key stakeholders, including healthcare services providers, training institutes including the Hong Kong Academy of Nursing and its colleges, and other experts of the profession to establish a voluntary scheme and implement the initiative within a two-year time frame. In the light of the outcome, the Government would consider devising a statutory registration regime. We would be grateful if NCHK would keep the Food and Health Bureau posted of the development of the preparation and implementation of such scheme. The relevant paper endorsed by the Task Force is enclosed for your reference.

We look forward to working with NCHK in advancing the professional development of the nursing profession in Hong Kong. I would be happy to brief NCHK in details if considered necessary. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,



(FONG Ngai)

Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Health)
Special Tasks

c.c. Director of Health (Attn: Dr Cindy LAI)

Task Force on Specialisation of Nursing Practice

Future Development of Specialisation of Nursing Practice in Hong Kong

PURPOSE

This paper summarises the key issues relating to specialisation of the nursing practice in Hong Kong and seeks Members' views on the way forward.

TASK FORCE ON SPECIALISATION OF NURSING PRACTICE

2. The Government recognises the pivotal role played by nurses in contributing to our healthcare system through advanced nursing practice and enhanced clinical specialties. Our nursing profession has taken years of rigorous training, continuous specialised education, and self-betterment to achieve advanced nursing practice/ specialty training. There are many dedicated training institutions, healthcare service providers, and nursing professional organisations which devote much efforts in advanced/ specialty nursing education and training. The Nursing Council of Hong Kong ("NCHK") has been encouraging nurses to undergo continuous nursing education ("CNE") for better nursing quality through implementing a CNE system on a voluntary basis since 2006. Specialty development is one of the key categories for further nursing education.

3. In 2016, the Government set up a Task Force on Specialisation of Nursing Practice ("the Task Force"), comprising key stakeholders in the nursing profession. The Task Force aims to study the applicability and practicability of introducing specialisation of nursing practice in Hong Kong, with the ultimate goal of putting in place a legal framework on nursing specialisation in the long run. This will certainly benefit our healthcare system with more skilled and experienced nurses to serve our patients in specialised areas.

4. After several rounds of both formal and informal meetings, presentations by overseas experts and various healthcare training providers, the Task Force agreed to further examine the following four key issues -

- (a) definition of advanced nursing practice;
- (b) scope of practice of nurses i.e. the functions and roles of nurses in the delivery of healthcare services;
- (c) framework of nursing specialisation; and
- (d) possible ways to facilitate the development of specialisation of nursing practice.

A synopsis of the deliberations of the Task Force is recapitulated below.

FACTORS RELATING TO NURSING SPECIALISATION

(a) Definition of Advanced Nursing Practice

5. As has been noted by the Task Force, there is no universal definition of advanced nursing practice. Different regimes have their own definition of advanced nursing practice with different emphasis. For example, the International Council of Nurses defines an “advanced practice nurse” **by the relevant skillsets acquired by nurses –**

“A Nurse Practitioner/ Advance Practice Nurse is a registered nurse who has acquired the expert knowledge base, complex decision-making skills and clinical competencies for expanded practice, the characteristics of which are shaped by the context and/or country in which he/she is credentialed to practice. A master’s degree is recommended for entry level.”

6. Meanwhile, the Nursing and Midwifery Council of the United Kingdom defines “advanced nurse practitioners”¹ **by the roles of nurses in the delivery of healthcare services –**

“Advanced nurse practitioners are highly experienced and

¹ http://www.advancedpractice.scot.nhs.uk/media/7847/nmc_definition_of_advanced_nurses.pdf

educated members of the care team who are able to diagnose and treat [one's] health care needs or refer [one] to an appropriate specialist if needed."

7. In the local context, NCHK has also prescribed various guidelines on the core competencies and scope of practice for nurses with different registration and competency standards. NCHK published the "Scope of Professional Practice" in 2015 (at **Annex**) which elaborated the Council's expectations in guiding the professional practice of nurses. In its position statement, it reads that –

"The scope of practice encompasses the roles, duties, and functions which the nurse is educated and competent to perform with professional autonomy and accountability. Professional nursing's scope of practice is dynamic and continually evolving, characterised by a flexible boundary responsive to the changing needs of society and the expanding knowledge base of applicable theoretical and scientific domains. Nurses contribute to preventing ill-health; attending to emergency and acute disease exacerbation; managing long term health conditions; and offering end-of-life care. Nurses work across the life span of individuals and in all settings within hospitals, healthcare institutions as well as in the community and patient's home"

8. The Hospital Authority ("HA"), the major healthcare service provider which employs the most nurses in Hong Kong, has set out the **core competencies of its advanced practice nurses²** as follows -

"Advanced Practice Nurses are responsible for the overall patient care and complex cases with multiple and refractory problems. They build culture and system to ensure safe and effective care delivery. They develop expertise in practice and become the resource persons in their particular area(s). They are the leaders of the team(s) facilitating effective team processes and work cross-sectorially. They are expected to contribute actively to knowledge/evidence based practice and service development. Besides being the "carer of patients",

² [http://www3.ha.org.hk/nurse/nursing/doc/HACoreCompetency\(23Sept06\).pdf](http://www3.ha.org.hk/nurse/nursing/doc/HACoreCompetency(23Sept06).pdf)

they are also the “carer of carers” facilitating the growth and development of peers.”

9. The Task Force agreed that **a clear and appropriate definition of “advanced nursing practice” which would be widely accepted by the nursing profession in Hong Kong and suit the local circumstances would be of utmost importance.** It helps lay a common ground for meaningful discussion on specialisation of nursing practice in Hong Kong. In coming up with a definition of “advanced nursing practice”, there may be a need to consider, among others, the roles and functions of advanced practice nurses in both the public and private sectors, relevant educational and training requirement and the service delivery models of healthcare service providers.

(b) Scope of Practice of Nurses

10. Nurses are playing an increasingly important role in the delivery of healthcare services. As announced by the Chief Executive in the 2017 Policy Address, the Government advocated for more cross-profession and multi-disciplinary collaboration to make better use of our resources and provide more comprehensive care for the needy in society. For instance, HA will set up more nurse clinics and enhance the services of the existing ones in particular in urology and rheumatology, and expand perioperative nurse clinics so as to facilitate patients’ early access to treatment and continuity of care. The proposed improved service model through nurse clinics is a patient-centred model which focuses on the needs of individual in the continuum of specialist care, and puts emphasis on access and effective intervention of problems in a timely manner.

11. Given the growing demand for healthcare services due to ageing population, prevalence of chronic diseases, development of primary care and growing importance of palliative care, **the role of nurses will need to be expanded and nursing specialisation is a necessary outcome.** The Government needs to set clear policy directions to enable the outcome to be achieved.

(c) Existing Avenues for Advanced Nursing Practice/ Specialty Training

12. Currently, there are different avenues for advanced nursing practice/ specialty training which help facilitate the formalisation of nursing specialization.

These avenues and initiatives include -

- (a) post-registration certificate courses provided by the Institute of Advanced Nursing Studies;
- (b) training for Registered Nurses (Health) of the Department of Health;
- (c) fellowship/ membership of the Hong Kong Academy of Nursing (“HKAN”); and
- (d) local or overseas programmes offered by training institutes.

13. **These avenues and initiatives**, which are effective in furthering the development of nurses in different sectors, **could complement each other** in the provision of training and exchange of experience and knowledge. To take forward advanced nursing practice/ specialty training in a coordinated and effective manner, a coordinator is needed to spearhead and manage a structured education and training mechanism for the nursing profession.

(d) Possible Ways to Facilitate the Development of Specialisation of Nursing Practice

14. With the rapid development of medical technologies, the development of nursing specialisation is urgently needed. It may be pragmatic to facilitate the development of nursing specialisation practice through administrative measures in the short to medium term, with the ultimate goal of putting in place a legal framework.

15. In Hong Kong, the majority of nurses were employed by HA. HA, being the major healthcare service providers, has been carrying out various initiatives to help its nursing staff to pursue advancement in specialty nursing practice which would in turn support the provision of better healthcare services by HA. At the Retreat of the Task Force held on 13 January 2017, it was agreed that HA and training institutes including HKAN and its colleges could supplement each other in the provision of specialist nursing training and there was room for cooperation among HA and training institutes. HA undertook to work out the detailed arrangements in facilitating practicum for HA nurses who are undergoing fellowship training with the colleges under HKAN. As proposed by HA, a pilot scheme would be implemented in the following four specialties: Paediatrics, Intensive Care, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, as well as Medicine.

16. Working meetings with HA, Hong Kong Private Hospitals Association and HKAN had also been convened to discuss on the feasibility of identifying possible specialty areas for implementing a pilot scheme for nurses working in private hospitals. Efforts will be continued on this front.

17. In addition, it was also suggested that a voluntary scheme could be introduced for nurses with advanced expertise and specialty skillsets so that the expertise, experience and qualifications of nurses could be recognised while healthcare service providers could deploy nurses to provide healthcare services in a more effective way.

WAY FORWARD

18. NCHK is a statutory authority established under the Nurses Registration Ordinance (Cap. 164) (“NRO”) and is responsible for the regulation of the nursing profession. The Council approves registration standards, codes, and competency standards that determine the requirements and the Council’s expectations in guiding the professional practice of nurses in local practice. Noting that NCHK is the only statutory authority of the nursing profession in Hong Kong and riding on its present role in the enrolment and registration of nurses, accreditation of training institutions and courses, as well as the administration of voluntary CNE etc., we **propose** to invite NCHK to formulate a voluntary scheme which could help advance the professional competence of nurses in Hong Kong and pave the way for the formalisation of advanced and specialised nursing practice.

19. Under the initial proposal, NCHK will -

- (a) **prescribe guidelines** on the scope of practice or/and core competencies of nurses with advanced expertise and standards,
- (b) **devise a mechanism** by setting training standards and recognising training institutes, and
- (c) explore the feasibility of **setting up a mechanism for advanced practice register under NCHK,**

with a view to formalizing advanced/specialty nursing practice in Hong Kong.

20. NCHK will work with key stakeholders, including HA and other healthcare services providers, training institutes including HKAN and its colleges, and other experts of the profession to devise a **voluntary scheme initially** and implement the initiative within a **two-year timeframe**. In the light of the outcome, the Government would consider devising a **statutory registration regime**.

21. In addition, administrative measures including but not limited to the forms of recognition, training models and practicum arrangements, should be explored and implemented within the profession so as to facilitate effective and smooth implementation of nursing specialisation practice.

ADVICE SOUGHT

22. Members are invited to comment on the way forward. In the light of feedback, we will invite NCHK to press ahead with the proposals and keep the Food and Health Bureau posted.

Food and Health Bureau

January 2018

(updated in March after the 2nd meeting of the Task Force)