



香港精神科醫學院

The Hong Kong College of Psychiatrists Ltd.

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Newsletter #5-2012

31 August 2012

Dear Fellows, Members, Inceptors and Affiliates,

I. Opinions submitted to South China Morning Post on shortage of clinicians in Mental Health

The College Council submitted a letter to South China Morning Post (SCMP) in response to a recent tragic incidence on 11 August 2012. Prof Linda Lam, on behalf of the College, had an interview with a health reporter of SCMP to express the Council's concern about manpower shortage and urged for a mental health policy. The newspaper clipping is enclosed with this newsletter in the appendix.

II. Sponsorships for the 3rd HK-UK Joint International Conference

The Hong Kong and Royal College of Psychiatrists will be organising the Third HK-UK Joint International Conference at the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine Jockey Club Building on 8-10 December 2012. The College has been offered sponsorships from a number of drug companies and would like to invite applications from Fellows/Members/Inceptors. Please apply based on the instructions below **on or before 30 September 2012.** The selection criteria will be in accordance with the scoring system posted on the College website: <http://www.hkpsych.org.hk/>

Interested members should write to **Ms Sabrina Hung** at *The Hong Kong College of Psychiatrists, Room 906, HK Academy of Medicine Jockey Club Building, 99 Wong Chuk Hang Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong* or fax to 2870-1391 or email at hkpsych_eo@hkam.org.hk. Please state in your application: (1) whether you are a fellow, member or inceptor of the College; (2) when you were last sponsored by the College to attend conferences/meetings; (3) whether you are a Council Member/Chairman or member of a Standing Committee of the College; (4) your subspecialty (one only) or field of knowledge (one only) and whether you are serving in the private or public sector; (5) whether you are going to present a paper in that conference/meeting (documentation required). Applications with incomplete information will not be processed. **If you do not receive a reply (written or verbal) from the responsible coordinator on or before 15 October 2012, please contact Ms Sabrina Hung at 2871-8770.**

Thank you for your attention.

Dr. WH CHEUNG
Honorary Secretary
The Hong Kong College of Psychiatrists

HEALTH

HK FACES 20-YEAR PSYCHIATRY CRISIS

Professor warns the city needs at least 700 specialists but only has 275 - not enough to cope with rise in tragedies involving mental patients

Emily Tsang
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The severe shortage of psychiatrists in public hospitals is likely to continue for at least two decades, while the city struggles to deal with an increase in fatal tragedies involving mental patients, a leading psychiatrist has warned.

Citing standards established by the World Health Organisation, Hong Kong College of Psychiatrists president Professor Linda Lam Chiu-wa said there

should be one psychiatrist for every 10,000 people - meaning Hong Kong needs at least 700. At present, there are only 275.

Meanwhile, only nine out of 305 trainee doctors have been assigned to six-year psychiatric courses this year, a drop of more than half from 20 in 2011. At the same time, the pace of recruitment has fallen behind the turnover rate in psychiatry, which saw a loss of 11 doctors last year.

The shortfall was put in sharp focus this month when a schizophrenic woman allegedly threw

her two-month-old daughter to her death from a high-rise building. Lam said the tragedy was another sober reminder of the inadequate attention our society had given to mental health care.

"Lack of clinicians in mental health has been a long-standing problem. The manpower for psychiatrists in the city still falls far short of our counterparts with comparable socio-economic standards," she said.

Of the 275 registered psychiatrists in the city, around 70 work in private clinics, leaving those

remaining in public hospitals to take care of at least 200,000 patients who have been diagnosed with severe mental disorders.

"Even if 20 trainees are assigned to the field each year, it would still take 20 years or so for the number to meet the international standard," the professor said.

The Hospital Authority says there are not enough medical graduates to assign to certain specialities while other fields such as internal medicine, accident and emergency, and surgery have far greater need for doctors.

Dr Pang Fei-chau, the authority's chief manager (medical grades), said: "Our priority is to fill

existing vacancies in different specialities first. We are trying our best to hire people, but the number of graduates is limited."

The authority has assigned 69 trainees to internal medicine, a field which saw the departure of 70 doctors last year - the greatest loss of all specialities. Accident and emergency units and surgery have been assigned 42 doctors, while surgery has 32 trainees this year to take up vacancies.

Pang expected the overall shortage in doctors would not begin to be resolved until 2015, when the number of graduate doctors will increase from the existing 250 a year to around 400. It takes a trainee at least six years

of college and clinical training to become a specialist.

Lam said the government should formulate a long-term mental health policy so that psychiatrists - who are working under great pressure with huge workloads in public hospitals - can see better prospects.

"They feel gloomy about their future now, as it seems no balance can be reached in the foreseeable future between the manpower shortage and increasing public demand," she said.

"It is to be expected more will chose to leave the public sector under this undesirable environment, and that society may suffer with tragedies harder to prevent."