

Prof. LO Chung Mau, BBS, JP
Secretary for Health
The Government of HKSAR

1 Aug 2024

Re: Healthcare Manpower Projection 2023

Dear Prof. Lo,

The 'Review Report on Healthcare Manpower Planning and Professional Development Strategy' was compiled in June 2017.¹ Since then, the government has been carrying out regular healthcare manpower projections to update the supply and demand figures of healthcare professionals, as well as the direction and regulation of professional development.

The Hong Kong Physiotherapy Association (HKPA) and the Hong Kong Physiotherapists' Union (HKPU) noted that the Health Bureau had commissioned the Hospital Authority to conduct the latest round of manpower projections in 2023, and the report (Healthcare Manpower Projection 2023) was released on 14 June 2024.² The captioned Report projected that the current shortage of physiotherapists would be balanced by 2029, with a subsequent surplus reaching 1060 physiotherapists in 2040. The new projection was a blunt opposite of the 2021 Report,³ which indicated a persistent shortage of 276 and 487 physiotherapists in Hong Kong by 2030 and 2040 respectively, despite the launching of new self-financing physiotherapy programmes.

Both HKPA and HKPU were seriously concerned about the massive difference in the manpower projection of physiotherapists in Hong Kong across the two consecutive reports. A thorough understanding and clarification for the following was deemed necessary:

1. Methodology and confidence intervals of the estimates

The factors considered in the manpower projection and the confidence intervals of the estimates were not provided in the 2023 Report. To better understand the validity and generalizability of the current findings, transparent and detailed reporting of methodology is required for an accurate interpretation of the projection.

2. Unclear reasons for the significant change in physiotherapists' manpower projection

The captioned Report lacked supporting details for the reversal in physiotherapists' manpower projection. Key factors contributing to this massive difference in the projection must be elaborated because these are crucial for reviewing the current manpower policy as well as for planning appropriate follow-up actions.

3. Consultation with HKPA and HKPU

To our best understanding, both the Hong Kong Physiotherapy Association and the Hong Kong Physiotherapists' Union had never been approached by the Hospital Authority to provide opinions on the Healthcare Manpower Projection 2023, yet both professional bodies were listed as being consulted.

4. Importing non-local physiotherapists to meet the short-term manpower shortage

All along, there has been well set registration policy for non-locally trained physiotherapists under the Physiotherapists Board. With the increased supply of locally trained physiotherapists by the 3 additional self-financing programmes launched in the Tung Wah College, Hong Kong Metropolitan University and the St. Francis University, we have great reservations on the additionally short-term import of non-locally trained physiotherapists.

The Healthcare Manpower Projection 2023 has paramount influence on manpower policy in healthcare. Indeed, the 2017 Report had indicated an urgent need to increase the supply of physiotherapists to meet the foreseeable surging demand for physiotherapy service. Hence self-financing physiotherapy programmes were proposed and well supported by the Government to reduce the projected manpower shortage. In 2018 and 2020, three non-UGC-funded physiotherapy training programmes were launched in 3 local tertiary institutes. The completely reverse projections in the 2023 Report have hampered our confidence to act in accordance with the Report.

It is important to have a transparent and accurate healthcare manpower projection to facilitate the development of manpower policy and quality healthcare service. We look forward to receiving your reply and working together with you effectively in the healthcare development of Hong Kong.

Yours Sincerely,



Mr. Alexander WOO
President
Hong Kong Physiotherapy Association



Mrs. Eleanor CHAN
President
Hong Kong Physiotherapists' Union

References:

1. Food and Health Bureau. (2017). Strategic Review on Healthcare Manpower Planning and Professional Development Report. https://www.healthbureau.gov.hk/download/press_and_publications/otherinfo/180500_sr/e_sr_final_report.pdf
2. Health Bureau. (2024). Legislative Council Panel on Health Services - Healthcare Manpower Projection 2023. <https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr2024/english/panels/hs/papers/hs20240220cb4-191-3-e.pdf>
3. Food and Health Bureau. (2021). Updates of the Study on Healthcare Manpower Projection. <https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr20-21/english/panels/hs/papers/hs20210324cb4-600-5-e.pdf>