Public Consultation on the Dentists (Amendment) Bill

INTRODUCTION

1. The Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Dental Council is amending the Dentists Act (DA) 1999 to ensure that it is relevant to the current practice and new developments in the field of dentistry.

2. The key amendments introduced include compulsory continuing professional education for dentists; the setting up of a Dental Specialists Register; and the registration and regulation of dental care professionals. Other amendments have also been made to allow the Dental Council to function more effectively as a regulatory body.

3. A public consultation on making continuing professional education compulsory for dentists and the setting up of a Dental Specialists Register was carried out in April/May 2004. For compulsory continuing professional education for dentists, MOH received 66 responses from the public and dental professionals and for the Dental Specialists Register, 182 responses. The details can be viewed at MOH’s website at http://www.moh.gov.sg/corp/eservices/econsultation/details.do?id=91 and http://www.moh.gov.sg/corp/eservices/econsultation/details.do?id=90.

4. There was broad support for the implementation of compulsory continuing professional education for dentists and the setting up of a Dental Specialists Register. The feedback received was taken into consideration for the drafting of the Dentists (Amendment) Bill. MOH would now like to seek the views and feedback of the public, the dental professionals and dental organisations on the draft Dentists (Amendment) Bill.

THE DENTISTS (AMENDMENT) BILL

5. The amendments to be made to the Dentists Act are as follows:

   a. Compulsory Continuing Professional Education (CPE)

      The public enjoys good quality dental care and must continue to do so. This means that dentists must keep up with the rapid changes made in scientific knowledge, dental practice and the development of new materials and technologies. Dentists must also be able to counsel and provide well-informed professional advice to patients. Compulsory CPE would help to achieve these. A majority of the respondents supported the implementation of compulsory CPE for Dentists during the public consultation.
b. **Dental Specialists Register (DSR)**

The setting up of a DSR is a necessary step for the growth and development of specialised dental practice which is required for the management of complex dental cases. It will ensure that Singaporeans who require up-to-date and specialised dental care will continue to have access to them. It will also assist patients and the public to identify more easily dentists who have specialised skills and expertise in specific areas of dentistry. A majority of the respondents supported the establishment of a Dental Specialists Register during the public consultation.

c. **Dental Care Professionals**

Amendments are also proposed for the Dental Council to regulate dental care professionals. The dental care professionals include oral health therapists, dental therapists and dental hygienists. Dental care professionals support a dentist’s practice and will be able to provide a limited range of basic dental care (e.g. scaling, polishing, oral health education, etc.) to the public. Dental care professionals have been providing basic dental care in countries like the USA, UK and Australia for many years. Registration and regulation will ensure that these dental care professionals are appropriately trained and accredited for the safe provision of dental care to Singaporeans.

d. **Compulsory Voting**

Voting of members into the Dental Council is currently compulsory for all registered dentists. However, registered dentists also include those who are no longer practising in Singapore (e.g. those who have gone overseas for training). For more effective administration of the voting exercise, amendments have been proposed to stipulate that compulsory voting will only apply to registered dentists with current practising certificates.

e. **Registrar of the Dental Council**

The Act stipulates that the Minister shall appoint a registered dentist as the Registrar of the Dental Council. As the Chief Dental Officer (CDO) is in the best position to provide inputs and implement the dental policies of MOH, it is proposed that the Act be amended to state that the CDO shall be an appointed member of the Dental Council and also assume the appointment of Registrar.
f. Registration of Dentists

It is proposed that registration of dentists be differentiated into Full Registration\(^1\), Conditional Registration\(^2\) and Temporary Registration\(^3\). The differentiation will enable clearer guidelines to be drawn up for registration and the practice of dentistry. A new section will also be added to clearly define and regulate the registration of additional qualifications. The requirement for a dentist to exhibit the practising certificate conspicuously in the premises will be removed as inspection of premises is not under the purview of the Dental Council.

g. Removal of Names

The Act will also be amended to empower the Registrar to remove the names of persons who have:

i. Not renewed their practising certificates for a continuous period of not less than 5 years and who cannot be contacted or sent any document using the particulars in the register; and

ii. Requested and shown sufficient reason for his name to be removed from the register, unless an inquiry has or proceedings have commenced against the person.

h. Disciplinary Proceedings

In order to strengthen Dental Council’s regulatory role, changes are also proposed to the disciplinary proceedings which include:

\(^1\) For any person who holds a Singapore degree and for any person who holds other qualifications as may be recognised by the Dental Council, and satisfies the Council that he has special knowledge and skill and sufficient experience in any particular branch of dentistry.

\(^2\) For any person who holds a degree from a university specified in the Schedule or any other degree which is, in the opinion of the Council, not lower in standing than a degree specified in the Schedule and has been selected for employment in Singapore as a dentist in any hospital or other institution or dental practice approved by the Council and satisfies the Council that he has the knowledge and skill and has acquired the experience which is necessary for practice as a dentist. The conditions of registration will be specified.

\(^3\) For any person who has a degree other than a Singapore degree and who is in Singapore for the purpose of teaching, research or postgraduate study in dentistry under such training scheme as may be approved by the Council or who possesses dental knowledge, experience and skill which the Council considers to be of international standing or are such as to have special value to the people of Singapore or who is not otherwise entitled to be registered as a dentist under this Act but who, in the opinion of the Council, possesses other qualifications which are adequate for the purposes of registration under this Act. The registration shall be for a period not exceeding 3 years. The registration may be renewed at the discretion of the Council.
i. Empowering the complaints committee, in the course of its inquiry, to decide on its own motion to inquire into a new matter when it receives information on the conduct or physical or mental fitness of the dentist which may lead to disciplinary proceedings against the dentist;

ii. Allowing the Dental Council to direct that an inquiry be continued even if the complainant withdraws the complaint before it is referred to:

   iia. A Complaints Committee; or
   iib. A Health Committee; or
   iic. A Disciplinary Committee; or
   iid. Before the conclusion of the inquiry of the abovementioned committees; and
   iie. Empowering the disciplinary committee to refer information to the relevant authorities for further investigation if there are reasons for the disciplinary committee to believe that a criminal offence or offences under other statutes might have been committed.

i. **Maximum financial penalty imposed by the Disciplinary Committee**

   The Dentists Act 1999 only allows the disciplinary committee to impose a financial penalty not exceeding $5,000 for disciplinary cases. It is proposed that the maximum financial penalty imposable by the disciplinary committee be increased to $50,000.

j. **Disciplinary Committee**

   The amended Act will allow the President of the Dental Council to appoint Disciplinary Committees consisting of a chairman from a panel appointed by the Minister, a member of the Dental Council, a member of the Complaints Panel who is not a member of the Council and a lay person as an observer. The Disciplinary Committee will look into complaints or other matters that are referred to it.

k. **Interim Orders Committee**

   The proposed amendments to the Act also include the appointment of an Interim Orders Committee. The main function of this committee is to issue an interim suspension order or an order for interim
restricted registration to a registered dentist or a registered dental care professional for the protection of the members of the public.

1. Decriminalisation of Minor Offences

A range of penalties which includes the compounding of offences and administrative actions will also be introduced to give the Dental Council greater flexibility and to decriminalise minor offences under the Act.

The public is welcomed to post their feedback on the e-consultation page at the Ministry’s website. All feedback should reach the Ministry by 19 August 2006.

Ministry of Health
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