

Postgraduate Training and Assessment in Hong Kong

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Abstract

The Hong Kong Academy of Medicine, established in 1993, is the only statutory body in Hong Kong to train, assess and accredit medical and dental specialists. According to the law in Hong Kong, a doctor or dentist who wishes to have his name included in the Specialist Register of Medical Council or Dental Council must either be a Fellow of the Academy or be assessed and certified by the Academy to have qualifications and training comparable to that required of an Academy Fellow. Once a doctor or dentist is on the Specialist Register, he must fulfil the continuing medical education requirements as determined by the Academy to maintain his specialist status. The Hospital Authority of Hong Kong has implemented the Doctor Work Reform (DWR) since 2006 which involves reduction of doctors' work hours and may affect training. The long-term strategy of the Academy with regards to the issue of DWR is to modernise postgraduate medical education and closely monitor the process to ensure that the quality of training would not be affected.

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The Past¹

The Faculty of Medicine of the University of Hong Kong was founded in 1887 as the Hong Kong College of Medicine. It was the first faculty of the University of Hong Kong and was the only center for the training of western medicine until 1982 when the Chinese University established its medical school. The MBBS of the University of Hong Kong was first recognised by the UK Medical Council in 1913. These 2 medical schools have since been responsible for undergraduate medical education.

Before the establishment of the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine, postgraduate medical education or specialist training was not as structured as undergraduate education. For many years, specialist training took place only in the teaching hospitals of the University of Hong Kong. Specialists were trained in other public hospitals after the standard of practice and staffing of these public hospitals had improved. Some of the posts in these hospitals were recognised by Royal Colleges in UK and the training requirements of these UK Colleges were adhered to. In some specialties, the training in Hong Kong was only partly recognised by the UK Colleges and trainees had to

complete the training requirements in the UK hospitals. In the early days, trainees were not allowed to sit for the examination until they had completed the UK component of training. It was only later, when the Hong Kong training was fully recognised, that doctors could go to UK simply to gain experience. These specialist training programmes usually took 3 to 5 years and depended to a large extent on the conscientiousness of the doctors under training, and the commitment and goodwill of a small number of trainers. The doctors on these programmes had to take the examinations in UK. If successful, they became Members or Fellows of the various Royal Colleges of UK.

Establishment of the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine¹

The Hong Kong Academy of Medicine was established in 1993. The process leading to its inception, however, commenced much earlier when members of the Medical Council of Hong Kong first agreed on 9 July 1968 that it would be desirable to compile a register of medical specialists. The Medical Council of Hong Kong, established in June 1967, is the statutory licensing body regulating the registration of practitioners in medicine and surgery.

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In late 1986, the Hong Kong Government appointed a working party, officially entitled ‘The Hong Kong Government Working Party on Postgraduate Medical Education and Training’, to look into the need for postgraduate medical education in Hong Kong, and to make recommendations for improvements.

The Working Party published an interim report in September 1987 and submitted its final report (the ‘Halnan Report’) to the Hong Kong Government in October 1988. In brief, the major findings and recommendations of the Halnan Report were as follows:

- That there was an urgent need to establish a formalised, locally-based postgraduate and CME programme to ensure a high level of clinical competence.
- In pursuit of this objective, a statutory Hong Kong Academy of Medicine should be established. The principal role of the Academy would be to set standards, define the content and duration of training courses and accredit those who had successfully completed and passed the required examinations.

The medical community was consulted on the Working Party’s recommendations towards the end of 1988 and there was unanimous support for the establishment of a Hong Kong Academy of Medicine as soon as possible. On 26 September 1989, on the advice of the Executive Council, the Governor ordered that approval in principle be given to proceed with the establishment of the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine.

On 13 October 1989, the Governor appointed Prof David Todd, CBE, JP, head of the Department of Medicine at the University of Hong Kong, as Chairman of the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine Preparatory Committee.

On 26 January and 16 February 1990, the Governor appointed 21 nominees from the relevant medical bodies to the Preparatory Committee. The Secretary for Health and Welfare, the Director of Hospital Services, and the Director of Health were also appointed to serve as members of the Preparatory Committee.

The Interim Council of the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine was formally appointed on 1 August 1992, the date on which the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine Ordinance, Cap. 419, came into effect after its enactment on 25 June 1992, and held its first meeting on 3 September.

The Academy’s Inaugural Ceremony was held on 9 December 1993 at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre. The ceremony was officiated by the last British Governor of Hong Kong, the Rt. Hon. Mr Christopher Patten and over 2000 Fellows were admitted according to the admission criteria determined by the Interim Council.

The Statutory Power of the Academy

The Academy is the only statutory body in Hong Kong to train, assess and accredit medical and dental specialists. It admits registered medical and dental practitioners as Fellows if they have fulfilled the training and examination requirements of the Academy. According to the Medical Registration Ordinance² and the Dentists Registration Ordinance,³ a medical or dental practitioner who wishes to have his name included in the Specialist Register of Medical Council or Dental Council must either be a Fellow of the Academy or be assessed and certified by the Academy to have qualifications and training comparable to that required of an Academy Fellow. Once a doctor or dentist is on the Specialist Register (SR), he must fulfil the continuing medical education requirements as determined by the Academy to maintain his SR status.

In Hong Kong, only registered medical practitioners and dentists whose names have been included in the Specialist Register of the Medical Council or Dental Council can use the title of “specialist in name of specialty”.

Academy Colleges/Specialties

The Academy consists of 15 constituent colleges:

1. Hong Kong College of Anaesthesiologists
2. Hong Kong College of Community Medicine
3. College of Dental Surgeons of Hong Kong
4. Hong Kong College of Emergency Medicine
5. Hong Kong College of Family Physicians
6. Hong Kong College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists
7. College of Ophthalmologists of Hong Kong
8. Hong Kong College of Orthopaedic Surgeons
9. Hong Kong College of Otorhinolaryngologists
10. Hong Kong College of Paediatricians
11. Hong Kong College of Pathologists
12. Hong Kong College of Physicians
13. Hong Kong College of Psychiatrists
14. Hong Kong College of Radiologists
15. College of Surgeons of Hong Kong

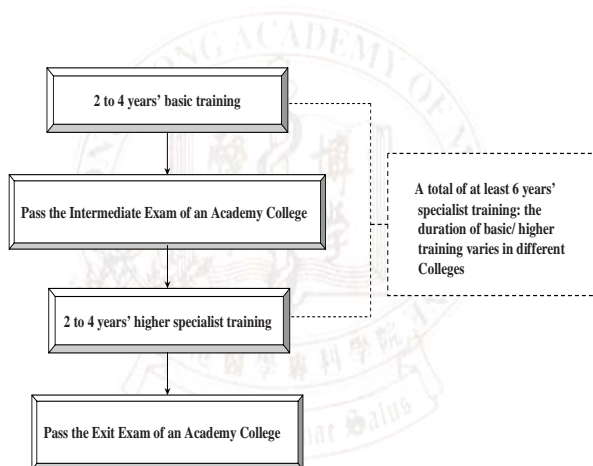
Currently, the Academy has a total of over 5500 Fellows. There are 52 medical specialties and 8 dental specialties accredited by the 15 Colleges.

Training and Assessment

Registered doctors and dentists who wish to become an Academy Fellow would need to apply for a training

post approved by an Academy College. They are then required to complete at least 6 years of training (basic and higher training), and pass the intermediate examination and exit examinations. All practising Fellows must fulfil the requirements of continuing medical education and continuous professional development in 3-year cycles to maintain the Fellowship. Training has to be conducted in accredited training centres, which are mainly hospitals under the Hospital Authority of Hong Kong. Fellowship examinations and assessments are conducted by individual Colleges. Some Colleges hold conjoint examinations with overseas Colleges.

Training and Examination/Assessment Process



Doctor Work Reform⁴ and its Impact on Training

In October 2006, the Hospital Authority in Hong Kong set up a Steering Committee on Doctor Work Hours with a view to formulating Doctor Work Reform (DWR) strategies and implementation in the Hospital Authority. Under the DWR, weekly work hours of public doctors would be reduced to 65 and doctors should not work continuously

for more than 13 to 16 hours. The Academy was concerned that the reduction in work hours of doctors would have an impact on quality of training. Therefore, it is necessary to develop and validate a competency assessment framework, which is contingent upon defining the outcomes of training. A research project based on a long-term cohort study was initially proposed, but the plan was dropped given that there were various limitation and abundant confounding factors, and uncertainties about (i) its cost-effectiveness and (ii) whether a useful result could be obtained.

The Academy understands that the decrease in doctors' work hours, being a world trend, is difficult to resist, and is of the view that limiting the weekly working hours to 65 hours should not have any major impact on training for the time being. However, the Academy accepts in principle that there are long-term impacts of DWR, especially if further reduction of working hours beyond 65 hours per week is required.

To move forward, the Academy will focus more on training, and take a more comprehensive approach to enhance the quality of postgraduate medical education. The long-term strategy for the Academy with regards to the issue of DWR is to modernise postgraduate medical education and closely monitor the process such that the quality of training would not be affected.

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