

TRAINING URGED FOR FAMILY DOCTORS

College of Family Physicians president says basic training is essential to reduce the burden on hospitals as the city's population gets older

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The city's family doctors should be given basic training to provide comprehensive family health care as some are not properly prepared for adopting a bigger role in future, according to a top family physician.

Dr Angus Chan Ming-wai, president of the College of Family Physicians, told the *South China Morning Post* that training in family medicine, a speciality which focuses on general care of people of all ages, would help doctors better handle patients.

Chan said such knowledge should also be required for doctors listed by the government as primary care doctors.

"Family doctors don't deal with flu only, but also physical, social and psychological issues. Many patients are actually suffering from anxiety and depression when they come to us," the family medicine specialist said.

Primary care, referred to as the first contact point in treating and preventing diseases in the community, is gaining importance as a way to reduce the burden on hospitals as the population ages.

Among some 13,000 doctors in Hong Kong, around 440 are specialists in family medicine. Other doctors providing such care could be specialists in areas such as paediatrics, as no specific postgraduate qualification is required for a registered doctor to provide primary care services.

"I always stress competence and independence... Are all medical graduates competent general practitioners right after their university training?" Chan said.

He said a six-year undergraduate education, which does not give students enough clinical exposure to prescriptions or diagnoses, would not be sufficient to

support the work of family doctors.

A specialist programme in family medicine, which takes six years to complete in the city, would help doctors conduct basic diagnoses before referring patients to other specialists if necessary, he said.

"I can diagnose a patient suffering from appendicitis and decide if surgery is needed, but I'm not the one to conduct the operation," he said.

While the Department of Health set up the Primary Care Doctor Directory in 2011 to give people a clearer idea of who is a family doctor, no qualification in family medicine is required for inclusion.



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"Doctors should at least acquire a diploma in family medicine to enrol in the directory," Chan said.

It takes around a year to complete diploma training, which involves both principles and updated clinical knowledge.

A department spokesman said doctors included in the directory were required to undertake continuous training to stay on the list.

To maintain the professional quality of non-specialists, a voluntary continuing education programme has also been offered since 2001 for doctors, which confers a specific continuing education title on them.



Dr Angus Chan calls for family doctors to be trained. Photo: Xiaomei Chen