

Administration attacked on health problems

By MARY ANN BENITEZ and ESME LAU

THE Hongkong Government was accused yesterday of "dragging its feet" in addressing problems of staff dissatisfaction at Government hospitals.

The criticism was made by the Health Services Panel of the OMELCO (Office of the Members of the Executive and Legislative Councillors) ahead of this afternoon's debate on problems facing medical and health services.

The panel's comments lend support for nurses who today begin their industrial action at all Government

hospitals and for Government doctors' whose action enters its second week.

Panel convener, Dr Leong Che-hung, described the administration's attitude as one of treating symptoms rather than addressing "the disease itself".

He said the administration failed to present to the panel "concrete and detailed" plans to meet the nurses' requests.

"The panel is most sympathetic to the nurses and the proposed industrial action," he said.

Co-convener Ronald Chow Mei-tak warned that if the nurses' problem was

not dealt with properly, it was likely to lower the standard of medical and health services.

The nurses are joining doctors in taking industrial action, despite a last-minute peace offering by the Government in the form of 200 new senior posts and better pay for student nurses.

Doctors and nurses also warned yesterday that their ears would be pinned to the adjournment debate and the response to be given by the Government.

Legislative Councillor Dr Leong will lead discussions by 12 other councillors on "the matter of medical

and health services in public sector hospitals". Secretary for Health and Welfare Brian Chau Tak-hay will reply on behalf of the Government.

The vice-chairman of the Government Doctors' Association, Dr Ho Shiu-wei, said yesterday: "We will be listening to the debate over the radio.

"We will be looking to the Government to show their sincerity and whether they are willing to set a meeting with us through the mediation of Dr Leong (Che-hung)."

Dr Ho said the doctors had made their position

clear that mediation could take various forms, so long as future talks with the administration would be official and minuted.

The Tung Wah Group of Hospitals' Doctors Association yesterday also released a press statement supporting their Government colleagues in seeking measures to resolve inadequacies in the services.

The association said the public and the medical profession had been asked "to wait in vain for too long already".

But they pointed out that many short-term measures (Cont'd on Page 2, Col 8)

Government accused of 'dragging its feet'

(Cont'd from Page 1)

could be implemented, and that a committee should be set up to look into solutions to the serious wastage of experienced doctors from Government and subvented hospitals.

Legislative Councillor James Tien Pei-chun is expected to present a five-point plan as a means of redressing staff unrest.

His plan is believed to include:

- Training more doctors than the present annual intake of 290 doctors to meet the need for 1,000 more doctors by 1992.
- The possibility of "buying places" at overseas medical schools if local universities are unable to expand their intake.
- Recruiting several hundred doctors from overseas to help reduce the burden on overworked local doctors.
- Creating better opportunities for post-graduate studies.
- Mounting a media campaign to attract more young women to the nursing profession.

Most of the 11,000 Government nurses are expected to disrupt hospital routine until April 1 in an attempt to embarrass the administration and to show the acute problems faced by the profession.

The nurses' work-to-rule action includes sending back worn out pyjamas to the Government laundry and changing bed linen more often, refusing to check patients' identity cards and boycotting tasks related to the discharge of patients.

Assistant director of the Medical and Health Services, Mr Victor Ng, said the nurses could have misunderstood the planned com-

mon grade system and the division of posts under the new Department of Health and the Hospital Services Department to begin on April 1.

Under the scheme, doctors, nurses and paramedics will be part of a common pool in order to protect their promotions, transfers and training opportunities when they move to either of the two new departments.

"The general feedback from most of the staff representatives was that the future arrangements for the staff provided adequate protection in their future posting and career development.

"The management of the department is making every effort to improve working conditions of our staff," said Mr Ng.

Forty representatives from the Big League of MHD Staff Unions met department officers yesterday.

Its convener, Mr Paul Chan Po-luk, said although they sympathised with the industrial action of nurses and doctors, the group would wait until next month before deciding on whether the staffing arrangements were adequate.