

Academy to 'correct' admissions

By MARIANA WAN

ONE of Hong Kong's most important statutory medical bodies is reviewing its admission procedures amid threats of legal action by a group of disgruntled doctors.

Documents obtained by the *South China Morning Post* show the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine has agreed to "correct" as soon as possible certain "legal

technicalities" in its admission procedure.

The academy, which is charged with postgraduate medical training, has inducted more than 2,000 doctors as foundation fellows. The inauguration ceremony was officiated by Governor Chris Patten about a year ago.

But the *Post* has learnt the qualifications of some of the fellows are now being challenged.

The documents show

two leading London counsel hired by the academy at a cost of about £10,000 (HK\$123,000) have identified problems.

Academy vice-president Dr Leong Che-hung last week refused to comment on whether the academy had admitted underqualified fellows, but admitted certain mistakes had been made and that "the academy could have done better".

"There are teething problems here and there.

There are faults here and there," he said.

He refused to identify the problems or elaborate on how they could be rectified, but said the academy council "should and would stand up and admit mistakes".

The possibility that some foundation fellows were wrongly admitted could damage the international reputation of the academy.

The academy has hoped to attain the same standing as the royal colleges in Brit-

ain so that doctors it accredited can be internationally recognised.

The row about who should be entitled to call themselves fellows concerns both doctors and patients, because fellows are likely to get on Hong Kong's first specialist registry automatically.

Hong Kong has no *bona fide* specialist register and none of the doctors claiming to be specialists are officially qualified to do so.

The group of doctors denied fellowships has warned that the academy would be working against the public interest if it did not review its admission procedures.

A solicitor's firm acting on the group's behalf has lodged a complaint with the academy, and recently with the Government, indicating they might seek a judicial review of the academy's admission criteria.

The rules say a doctor who has received six years'

specialist training and passed an examination can be admitted as a fellow.

But when the academy was setting up, doctors could be admitted as fellows through a so-called "grandfather" clause which took into account the time a doctor spent in private practice.

The academy has also admitted as foundation fellows doctors who have no specialist training at all, but have merely practised as a specialist for 25 years or more.

It is the legal status of this group which is being most strongly challenged.

It is understood a new category of "founding academician" is being contemplated for them.

At a recent council meeting, members also heard that about \$63,000 might need to be spent on reprinting diplomas for some "foundation fellows", because usage of the term was in doubt.

The documents show at

one stage printing of the diplomas was stopped by academy president Professor David Todd when it was suggested the term fellow would be printed instead of foundation fellow.

Dr Leong said a lot of the questions raised were due to "misunderstandings".

Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare Shelley Lau Lee Lai-kuen said there had been a "slip-up", adding the academy was putting its own house in order.

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