

Aid scheme not answer to nurses workload

By Ella Lee

A PILOT scheme using health-care assistants in two public hospitals would not solve the problem of overworked nurses unless administrative and medical procedures were streamlined, according to a nursing professional.

Legislative Council nursing representative Michael Ho says the best way to free nurses for more patient care would be to cut "unnecessary" administrative and medical requirements.

The Pamela Youde Nether-sole Eastern Hospital recruited nine health-care assistants in two wards to help nurses with the less skilful jobs.

Hospital Authority deputy chief development officer (Medical) Dr Lawrence Lai said the initial review indicated nurses and patients were satisfied with the new arrangements. He said the work of health-care assistants had freed nurses for more professional nursing duties.

A 1992 survey of 400 public nurses by the Chinese University showed they wanted non-nursing duties — which took up about 30 per cent of their working hours — to be carried out by support staff.

Work now being done by the assistants includes giving patients their meals, hygiene

care, moving patients for specialised checks, moving and turning patients and some clerical work. "The scheme will not affect the quality of patient services as the assistants work under the supervision of professional nursing staff," Dr Lai said.

The Kwong Wah Hospital also adopted the scheme this month with 15 health-care assistants working in three wards. The hospitals provided two to four weeks' training for the assistants, who all have Form Three education.

Dr Lai said the review of the scheme would show exactly how much and what kinds of tasks traditionally carried out by nurses had been shifted to health-care assistants.

The authority planned to promote the scheme in other hospitals if next month's final report was favourable.

Mr Ho agreed the scheme would help reduce the nurses' workload, but he urged the Hospital Authority to cut down on unnecessary work with which nurses were burdened.

"There are many unnecessary procedures that nurses now have to follow — such as too much clerical work and laboratory tests," he said.