

# \$42m for hospitals to spend on staff

By KATHY GRIFFIN

THE Hospital Authority will spend \$42 million this year on hiring more people but there will be no requirement that the money be spent on interns or other clinical staff.

The money will go to eight hospitals, which will have a say on how the cash is allocated — a move intended to make them more efficient and autonomous.

The emphasis will be to spend it on management rather than clinical services.

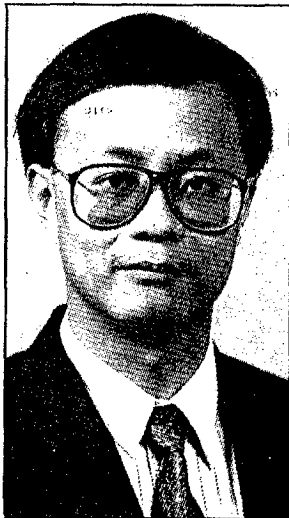
The authority recently came under fire when, for the first time, medical graduates were unable to find places in the public hospital system. The 15 interns subsequently were offered jobs.

Mr Wilfrid Tsui, a deputy director of operations for management in the Hospital Authority, said hospitals would have flexibility as to how they spent the money.

"However, if the hospital is going to gain autonomy, especially financial autonomy, we foresee it will have to build up a proper infrastructure in financial management as well as administration," he said.

"Before, the most senior person dealing with finance would have been a senior clerk. Under those circumstances it would be almost impossible for that person to undertake responsibility for a budget which could amount to millions or billions of dollars."

But legislator Mr Michael Ho Mun-ka, while wel-



Michael Ho Mun-ka

coming improvements to hospital management, worried the money might be spent at the expense of hiring more clinical staff.

"If there are more staff on the management side and less on the clinical side, it is going to be disastrous," he said.

"It's very much possible that the budgets received by hospitals this year are going to be less than they need to employ the same number of staff they did last year."

Mr Ho said hospitals were given only enough to cover salary expenditure and not their "establishment" which provided for positions approved but not yet filled.

The \$42 million will be divided among eight hospitals with Queen Elizabeth, Queen Mary, Princess Margaret and Prince of Wales

each receiving \$7.6 million, United Christian receiving \$4.7 million, and Tung Wah, Fung Yiu King Convalescent and Wong Tai Sin Infirmary each getting \$2.3 million.

Another \$10 million will be spent on management training and \$23 million on "minor operating expenses", spread out among the eight hospitals.

Mr Tsui said chief executives also would be appointed to these hospitals which were identified last year as the first to be revamped by the Hospital Authority.

New management structures will be set up by the end of this year to handle patient and community services, to bring staff into decision-making and resource management, and to improve administration and financial affairs.

Poor management has been considered to be at the root of long-standing problems such as queues, the need for camp beds and malaise among staff, and the new money is intended to strengthen the running of individual hospitals.

Another deputy director of operations, Mr Geoffrey Lieu, denied that ongoing concerns about the authority's top management and image, such as the problem with the interns, would affect the re-vamp.

The other 30 hospitals under the Hospital Authority will be dealt with within the next two years.