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Angry workers threaten action (4.1)

OVERWORKED nurses of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals are threatening industrial action if they are not given a promise of relief from their workload by early next month.

The work-to-rule would cover duties which the nurses say are not part of their job.

Ms Ho In-fong, chairman of the Union of Nursing Staff of the group, said nurses of Tung Wah's five hospitals had for years been performing various clerical jobs and other chores not in the scope of a nurse's duties.

"Compared with Government hospitals of a similar scale, our manpower strength is already less than half. If we have to continue performing additional duties with our limited staff, both the standard of patient care and teaching of student nurses will be impaired," Ms Ho said.

She said the 2,000 nurses of the group, including over 400 student nurses, had to be responsible for intravenous infusion and taking blood samples.

These were done by doctors in Government hospitals, she said.

Last November, for example, 34,000 blood samples were collected in Kwok Wah Hospital.

This task should require a staff of 20, but nurses have to undertake them as well as many other duties, Ms Ho said. The management of the hospital had suggested setting up special teams for duties which did not fall into the scope of either nurses or doctors.

It also promised to add extra clerical staff and study ways to quickly increase manpower.

She said if the board was sincere in wanting to improve the situation promptly, her 1,600-member union would postpone their work-to-rule plans.