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2000 nurses march to press claims

By VICKY WONG

ABOUT 2,000 off-duty government nurses from 14 hospitals handed in two petitions and a canvas camp bed to the Governor, Sir David Wilson, to highlight their grievances with the administration yesterday.

The camp bed symbolised overcrowded conditions and the widespread use of makeshift accommodation in Hongkong's public hospitals, said Association of Government Nursing Staff chairman, Mr Michael Ho Mun-kar.

"In taking away the canvas bed from us today, we hope that the Governor will also take away all canvas beds from hospitals in future," Mr Ho said to thunderous applause.

The association wants Sir David to look into the present

nurse wastage problem, the backward training and educational facilities available in Hongkong, as well as the nursing structure.

Mr Ho said the two petitions represented grievances from nurses in the Health Department and the Hospital Services Department, which were created yesterday from the former Medical and Health Department.

In addition, the association also handed Sir David a report of more than 100 pages with the nurses' recommendations on how the service could be improved.

Mr Ho said the association would hold a meeting on Friday at Queen Elizabeth Hospital to review Sir David's response and to decide on future action.

According to Legislative Councillor Mr Ronald Chow, the health care constituency's representative as well as the association's adviser, it has

been 10 years since nurses petitioned former Governor Sir Murray MacLehose in 1979 about their grievances.

However, although the petition then resulted in the administration reviewing the problem, little improvements had been made.

Retention and recruitment of staff remained a major problem and the government could neither hire qualified staff nor even find recruits for its student nursing programs since few people are even applying.

Serious problems also existed with nurse training which was still based on an outmoded apprenticeship system which had been discarded everywhere else in the world.

Even other countries which had similar systems to Hongkong had all changed over to a college-based education, he said.

Mr Chow noted that 10 years ago, nurses trained in Hongkong could work in Com-

monwealth countries as SRNs (state registered nurses) but their qualifications were no longer recognised outside of the territory today.

The lack of post-graduate training facilities in Hongkong also meant that nurses who wished to advance their professional skills and knowledge were forced to go overseas and many simply did not return.

"Even China in 1983 resumed a degree program for nurses," Mr Chow said.

"Hongkong's system has to follow other countries."

The nursing structure and lack of career prospects also remained serious problems. Mr Chow said, for instance, that many of the registered nurses present at yesterday's gathering had already attained that grade 10 years ago when the association petitioned Sir Murray about their grievances.

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