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3 Tung Wah unions sidestep petition

THREE of the five unions representing employees of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals said yesterday they had nothing to do with a petition to the governor asking him to set up a working party to investigate recent reforms being carried out by the group. The petition was sent to the Governor on Sunday by the Association of Staff.

The association was said to have about 70 members consisting mostly of teachers, clerical and administrative staff and several nursing and

para-medical employees. The other four unions in the Tung Wah Group are the Union of Nursing Staff, the Doctors Association, the Employees Association and the Members of Government Armed Forces and Hospital Chinese Workers Union Group.

Spokesman of three of the unions, comprising of about 1,600 members, yesterday said they were not involved in the petition, while the armed forces union group was not available for comment.

A spokeswoman of the nursing staff said they would support reforms aimed at improving overall efficiency.

"Some of the old regulations hindered improvement and prevented an efficient system of management," she said.

A spokesman for the doctors association said they did not know anything about the petition. He also said the administrative reshuffle had little to do with the medical department "but we'll remain neutral in the matter."

The chairman of the employees association, Leung Lai-ling, said most of the members of the association were minor employees and were not likely to be affected by the reforms.

"But we agree with some of the administrative reforms, especially the retirement scheme which was debated for many years but only introduced this year," he said.

The contents of the petition letter were not made known, but it was

reported that the Association of Staff had demanded a commission comprising representatives from the ICAC, past chairmen and prominent and fair-minded members of the community.

It was learned that copies of the letter were sent to the Senior Unofficial Member of the Executive Council, Sir Yuet-keung Kan, and former chairmen of Tung Wah.

Some Chinese newspapers recently received an open letter addressed to the "righteous public" from staff of the organisation alleging the existence of malpractices within the reform.

There is speculation that the petition and the open letter were prompted by fears of some staff members that they might lose their jobs under the reforms.

Tung Wah last year appointed a firm of management consultants to look into the overall management and the group's activities.

The report which was submitted earlier this year revealed that the organisation was overstaffed by between 10 and 20 per cent.

The Chief Executive Secretary of Tung Wah, Mrs Vivian Fong, declined to comment on the allegations in the open letter and the petition.

She said she had no knowledge of the petition beyond what she read in the newspapers.

She said an investigation would be conducted and a public statement issued later.