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Aftercare 'vital' for addicts 19-7

The Government has been urged to ensure there are adequate aftercare officers in the Correctional Services Department to provide supervision and counselling for drug addicts discharged from treatment centres.

The call was made by Dr Ho Kam-fai during the resumed debate on the Drug Addiction Treatment Centres (Amendment) Bill.

Dr Ho said the most crucial phase of rehabilitating drug addicts is to help them adapt to the pressures of life in the community, hold jobs and associate with family members and friends.

He noted that the most important amendment proposed in the bill is to shorten the minimum period of detention in order to maximise the effects of aftercare.

"The intention is to reduce to the minimum the chances of relapse. It is based on experience in mild cases that the shorter the time is spent inside the treatment centre, the lower the chances are of relapse," he said.

Dr Ho added that this approach is in line with the current rehabilitation practice for drug abusers and is therefore worthy of support.

However, he said the success of aftercare depends, to a large extent, on the quality of supervision.

"If there is any shortfall in manpower, additional resources must be allocated. Otherwise, the enactment of the proposed amendments to the bill will be a fruitless exercise," he stressed.

The Attorney-General, Mr Michael Thomas, said in reply that there might be an initial increase in the number of drug addicts released on supervision after the enactment of the bill, but it was expected to be minimal in the long term.

"The Commissioner of Correctional Services believes that his department will be quite capable of meeting any additional demand on staff resources arising from the enactment of this bill," Mr Thomas said.