



Quality HealthCare Staff Devotes in Serving the Community with Professionalism

Quality HealthCare always strives for providing the best services for the community; Linda Glover, Practice Manager of our Central Medical Centre is one of our members serving the clients with professionalism. As a registered nurse endeavored to ensure all patients receive the best medical attention, she very much enjoys her rewarding career and the following is the sharing of her working life reported by the South China Morning Post on 8th November 2008.

Chain clinics are expanding in HK as they provide specialised medical services for a reasonable price

Prescription for success

Local and international medical groups are changing Hong Kong's private medical sector as they expand and add specialised services to their portfolio.

Operating differently from individual practices, medical chains have the edge of offering a full range of services under one roof, from general medical consultations, in-house specialist services, health screening, dentistry, dermatology, traditional Chinese medicine and wellness services to performing minor operations, such as endoscopy, colonoscopy and excision.

These medical centres offer integrated, multidisciplinary health care services to people from all walks of life.

"Chain clinics' operations in the private sector have their roots in the United States and this business model has blossomed from the 1960s. Hong Kong's health care market has followed in the footsteps of the US in recent years," said Ronnie Hui Kai-wah, executive director of Town Health International Holdings Company, a local private medical group which started operations in 1989 and has since grown to run 22 clinics across the city.

"With decades of development, chain clinics have developed into a very mature market and there are a number of other operators among the competition."

According to Mr Hui, people who visit a medical centre are usually corporate executives, whose companies offer medical plans, expatriates and locals.

"Private medical centres offer choices of doctors from various medical disciplines and patients can

PRIVATE HEALTH CARE

Key players

- General practitioner
- Registered nurse
- Dispenser
- Radiographer
- Laboratory technician
- Phlebotomist
- Receptionist
- Health care assistant

Jargon

- **General practitioner** someone who practises general medicine and provides general consultations to patients
- **Specialist** a medical professional who specialises in a particular medical discipline and is usually referred to by a medical doctor for further diagnosis if the patient's problem persists
- **Physical** a series of tests performed for a body check, including blood and urine tests, cholesterol screening, a lung function test and an electrocardiogram heart test
- **Chit** an order sheet detailing the diagnosis of a problem is sent to various departments for further investigation or treatment

enjoy the convenience of having different doctors from different specialist areas at one single location and the fee is relatively lower," said Julie Chow Chi-lei, director of marketing and communications at Quality HealthCare Medical Centre.

Chain clinics have the advantage of being able to offer services to patients at lower prices as most of the resources can be shared among other clinics within the group.

"The competitive strength of chain clinics lies in economies of scale. Supportive resources can be pulled together and a large clientele base can be formed. This provides cost advantages as the costs on procurement, nursing support, marketing and many others can be shared," Mr Hui said.

Tapping into the pulse of the latest medical knowledge and technology is the key to serving patients effectively and efficiently.

With that in mind, Quality HealthCare organises internal and external programmes for medical professionals within the company.

"We provide more than 6,000 hours of training, sponsorships, medical conferences and study leave to our medical staff for their professional development. We always put our patients' interests first when it comes to health care," Ms Chow said.

The economic turmoil has unavoidably affected Hong Kong's health care sector, but its impact is considerably less acute, according to Mr Hui, because it is deemed as a basic necessity.

"With a financial tsunami of such huge magnitude, it is inevitable that even the health care market may face certain pressure. On the other hand, with the property market tumbling, our rental costs are on the decline and this cushions the

economic shock," Mr Hui said. The company aims to continually improve its operating efficiency to maintain its cost-effectiveness and ensure prices are competitive in the market.

As the number of these clinics grows in Hong Kong, the challenge for the private health care industry is not so much about further expanding locally as about penetrating into the mainland market. Understandably, the health care system on the mainland is very different from that of Hong Kong.

"Our group is embarking on the development of an integrated clinic chain on the mainland for the health care market," said Mr Hui, adding that the major challenge was to overcome many administrative hindrances and hurdles posed to outside players. "The health care sector is still a protected industry on the mainland," he said.

Job opportunities for medical professionals in the private sector will increase as more health care service providers are needed for baby boomers who will be in their late fifties over the next decade or so. There are also expectations of a rise in demand from mainlanders seeking consultation from experienced Hong Kong professionals.

Hong Kong private medical groups require not just doctors and nurses, but also people with expertise in areas such as marketing, administration and management. "This is especially so when we enter the mainland market. Information technology [IT] engineers are also needed to develop and maintain an IT framework which connects clinics at different localities and is able to provide the management with real-time figures on inventory and revenue," Mr Hui said.

All In A Day's Work

Written by Oliver To

'White angel' dispenses care and sympathy

Linda Glover, practice manager of Quality HealthCare Medical Centre, says nothing makes her happier than to see patients get well, be it from a common cold or some serious illness

I have been a registered nurse for many years and before joining Quality HealthCare in 2005, I worked as a unit supervisor in cardiac and pulmonary nursing at a private hospital in Hong Kong. As the practice manager supervising more than 40 staff at our main clinic in Central, I work closely with my colleagues at the company's 57 clinics across Hong Kong to ensure the office system and company policy are well maintained.

My responsibilities are to ensure that practices at the clinics are in line with international health care standards and that guidelines set out by the Hong Kong Department of Health are fully applied so that our patients can expect to receive the best service and health care possible. I also work closely with

my colleagues and staff to periodically update the operation protocols for everyone within the group so that mistakes in drug administration, customer satisfaction and personal hygiene will not happen.

Since our company has a huge base of patients, I need to organise a centralised team in our Central office to work on customer relations. We have a comment box located across all the clinics and patients' comments and suggestions are collected once every two weeks for review. Meanwhile, I and my team members who oversee this matter diligently go through all the comment sheets and later compile them into a report which is sent to management for discussion. We set a timeline for

ourselves to address patients' concerns so that they can receive our feedback swiftly. We see the need to maintain an effective communication channel which can improve the relationships between our doctors and patients.

Apart from taking care of customer relations and clinic administration, my first and foremost task is to ensure all the patients coming to our health centre receive the best medical attention. Because I deal with patients from all walks of life, it is important to have patience when talking to people who each come with different health backgrounds. I have patients who are senior citizens, so I have to spend extra time to educate them on the health benefits of exercising regularly and observing a good diet, as well as to carefully explain the importance of taking their medicines punctually.

Making sure every nurse and clinic staff member is performing to the group's standards is the key to maintaining the company's reputation.

The most challenging part of my job is that out of my daily hectic schedule I still have to find time to speak to some patients individually to follow up on their progress. There are cases where patients are under a new set of drug regimes for some chronic illness and I need to closely monitor their health.

In other cases, there are patients who just need someone like me to talk to for stress release. We take into account not just their physical well-being but also their mental health. I often have to play a good-listener role and try to clear the worries about their sickness. I may have to refer the patient to a specialist for treatment. I have to treat my patients like my family.

Being a nurse myself, there's nothing that makes me happier than to see my patients get well, be that from a common cold or some serious illness. People in my profession are often called "white angels" and I am happy with such a name, which I consider a compliment.

Linda Glover believes patience is vital in dealing with people of all backgrounds. Photo: Sam Tsang

