

# Hong Kong Dental Association promotes volunteerism: a new Professional Volunteer Service Accreditation Program

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The United Nations Volunteers values free will, commitment, engagement, and solidarity, which are the foundations of volunteerism <sup>1</sup>. As a professional, one must amplify one's "perfect act"—to behave with a lofty ideal and social responsibility. We should have a strong sense of mission—to follow persons who devote themselves to serve society as our models. Most importantly, we should unflinchingly look in the mirror to ascertain whether we are proud or ashamed of the work we undertake.

This article attempts to review the Hong Kong Dental Association (HKDA) Professional Volunteer Service Accreditation and Recognition Program with a view to motivate members to build up a harmonious and caring society through collaborative effort.

## Introduction

Community services have been shown to have a marked impact on patient attitudes and respect towards professionals—doctors and dentists. Public surveys over a 30-

year period have shown that the American medical profession has gone from the most trusted to the least trusted of social institutions <sup>2</sup>. In 1988, James E. Davis, a Past President of the American Medical Association, advocated community service as the hallmark of the medical profession <sup>3</sup>. He stated that public attitudes toward the medical profession, in times of disenchantment, would be improved if physicians were actively involved in service—and recommended 4 hours of voluntary work per week. Steiner *et al*<sup>4</sup>, citing Guen <sup>5</sup>, called for physicians to become more actively involved in community issues, and suggested that this was a means of regaining public trust in medicine, such trust having been seriously eroded through the years. Although many physicians are philosophically attracted to community service, financial pressures and time constraints create barriers to community engagement. In their case study, Steiner *et al*<sup>4</sup>, suggested recognition of community service activities and measures to determine "excellence" and "scholarship" in the community. Different values are granted to various community service activities. Thus, they may be high-profile activities resulting in the receipt of public service awards by statewide organizations or less well recognized activities such as contributing free care in a volunteer clinic or giving a presentation on health issues to a local group.

Being a major representative of the dental sector in Hong Kong, the HKDA should assume social responsibilities by raising public awareness of oral and dental health as well as exploring means of improving the career prospects for dentists. It is hoped that through this proposed Program, the Association can encourage its members to show more concern for the community and motivate them to build up a harmonious and caring society with a collaborative spirit.

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## Mission of the Program

The Program is introduced with the following missions:

1. To promote volunteer service among the profession, without gain.
2. To acknowledge volunteers as the pillars of society.
3. To encourage members of the HKDA to actively participate in voluntary services to contribute to society and build up a “caring community” spirit.
4. To show appreciation and recognition of dental professionals actively involved in voluntary services.
5. To play a proactive, pivotal role in building a civil society and caring community through promotion and development of sustainable volunteerism.
6. To recommend to the Council of HKDA and the Hong Kong Council of Volunteering the award of certificates to members actively devoted to volunteer service.
7. To mobilize and facilitate individuals, groups, and organizations to provide value-added, quality volunteer services.
8. To extend and promote this program to other professional bodies through liaison and close partnership with other sectors of the community under the guidance, coordination, and advice of the Hong Kong Council of Volunteering.

## Task force on Professional Volunteer Service Accreditation Program

A task force on this Program was initiated to explore the current situation with regard to voluntary services among HKDA members. A questionnaire survey was carried out in September 2005. Of the 60 HKDA members who responded, 47 replied that they had joined at least one volunteer service in the past year. The range of dentally related and non-dentally related activities are noted in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

## Professional Volunteer Service Committee

A new subcommittee named Professional Volunteer Service Committee (PVSC) under the auspices of the Hong Kong Dental Association was then set up and comprised a Chairman, Secretary, and members. Its first task was to implement and monitor an accreditation program to reflect the involvement of fellow members in volunteer services. The Program was based on a credit point system; credit hours were awarded for participation in voluntary services without monetary or equivalent gain. However, office bearers of the Association attend-

**Table 1** Range of dentally related volunteer activities of HKDA members

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1. The HKDA subcommittee meetings
  2. St. John Ambulance Association and Brigades
  3. The Society of Homes for the Handicapped
  4. Po Leung Kuk
  5. Other charity dental clinics without gain:
    - Project Concern Hong Kong
    - Oral Health Education Unit
    - Health talks to non-government organizations
    - China mission trips
    - Tung Wah Group of Hospitals
    - Tsim Sha Tsui Baptist Clinic
    - Dental Society, Hong Kong University Students' Union
    - Little Sisters of the Poor
    - Christian Concern for the Homeless Association
    - Free dental check-up for children from Heep Hong Society
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**Table 2** Range of non-dentally related volunteer activities of HKDA members

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1. Lions Club
  2. Rotary Club
  3. Yan Chai Hospital
  4. Fund raising campaign
  5. Charity walks
  6. Others:
    - Kiangsu and Chekiang Residents (HK) Association
    - HOPE worldwide Ltd.
    - The Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions
    - Scout Association of Hong Kong
    - Hong Kong Road Safety Patrol
    - Visits to elderly homes
    - The Hong Kong Life Saving Society
    - Agency for Volunteer Service
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ing Board meetings were not eligible for accreditation. Professional volunteer services entailed three categories as summarized in Table 3.

## Levels of recognition

A dentist will have to perform volunteer service without gain within the past 12 months, to attain the specified levels of recognition summarized below:

- Gold:  $\geq 100$  hours
- Silver:  $\geq 50$  and  $< 100$  hours
- Bronze:  $\geq 20$  and  $< 50$  hours
- Commendation:  $\geq 1$  and  $< 20$  hours

Each applicant must sign accreditation forms and supporting documents submitted to the HKDA by the end of the calendar year. A panel of judges will review

**Table 3** Classification of professional volunteer services

1. Volunteer services of the Hong Kong Dental Association (HKDA)
  - Participation in the HKDA subcommittee work and meetings, whether as Chairman or as a member
  - Representing the HKDA as a member of external bodies, on a volunteering basis
  - All community activities organized by the HKDA including oral health promotion campaigns, etc.
  - Any volunteer services of the HKDA, as determined by the Professional Volunteer Service Committee where appropriate
2. Dentally related volunteer services unrelated to the HKDA
  - St. John Ambulance Association and Brigades
  - Society of Homes for the Handicap
  - Po Leung Kuk
  - All charity dental clinic volunteer services without gain
3. Non-dentally related volunteer services without gain
  - Work on behalf of charitable organizations, e.g. Lions Club, Rotary Club, etc.
  - Work on behalf of hospitals, e.g. Yan Chai Hospital
  - Fund-raising campaigns, etc.
  - Charity walks, etc.

**Table 4** Range of accreditation hours (n=112) \*

Range of accredited hours	No. of participants in category A only	No. of participants in category B only	No. of participants in both category A and B
<20 hours	50	0	0
≥20 and <50 hours	37	2	1
≥50 and <100 hours	10	2	3
≥100 hours	0	2	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>

\* Category A denotes dentally related services, and category B non-dentally related services

the entries and accredit each applicant according to the hours of service to the community.

## Results

In the Year 2005, a total of 112 persons participated in the scheme. Numbers participating in each category and the corresponding range of accredited hours are summarized in Table 4.

Seven individuals accumulated ≥100 hours of community services (dentally or non-dentally related) and became eligible for the Gold Award. Fifteen have accumulated between ≥50 and <100 hours and became

**Table 5** The total and average accreditation hours of category A and B \*

	Total no. of accreditation hours	Average no. of accreditation hours †
Category A	2626	24.78
Category B	2699.5	179.97

\* Category A denotes dentally related services, and category B non-dentally related services

† Total no. of accreditation hours/no. of participants in each category

eligible for the Silver Award, whereas 40 participants dedicated between ≥20 and <50 hours to volunteer services and were eligible for the Bronze Award. The total and average number of accreditation hours are summarized in Table 5.

## Discussion

The questionnaire and the accreditation Program act as major steps that collect baseline data concerning volunteer efforts of Hong Kong dentists. This will assist the Association in devising future strategies to promote volunteering activities of the dental community. Summarizing the service activities of the members can better help distinguish areas of strength and weakness, that in turn can shed light on better utilization of manpower and resource allocation.

An award presentation ceremony was organized by the Association in appreciation of the unselfish work of the awardees during the past 12 months. However, the Committee is of the view that the number of respondents to this self-reporting program only represents a portion of all volunteering dentists in Hong Kong. Although recognition may not be a primary motivation for volunteering, it is highly valued by and has the potential to inspire and ignite the passion for volunteer work by others <sup>6</sup>. The Committee certainly respects those members who choose not to report their contributions. These awards act merely as a token of appreciation and to encourage more HKDA members to join the scheme. Recognition in the form of appreciation and rewards are needed to acknowledge and validate volunteer service, contributions, time, energy, and commitments.

According to the locally held 10th International Association for Volunteer Effort Asia-Pacific Regional Volunteer Conference in 2005, the need for volunteers continues. The HKDA, which is the most prominent

representative of the local dental profession, should echo the same sentiments. By pursuing this goal, it can assume a leading role in serving the community and advocate the culture of professional volunteering whilst demonstrating that it makes a difference, and is rewarding for the individual as well as the profession. In so doing, the Committee should strive to keep our members well informed of possible volunteer services and assist us in liaising with the Agency for Volunteer Service.

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