

Chapter 12

Contributions of Volunteers in Long-Term Care in Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT

With the efforts of Social Welfare Department, voluntary works in Hong Kong become systemic and popular. Volunteers have been involved in developing local elderly services in many organisations in recent years. Contributions of volunteers related to elderly services in some organisations have been reviewed in this chapter, introducing the scope of services among the volunteers. Training and rewarding systems are also highlighted in order to examine the engagement of volunteers. The case of a local welfare organisation is used to discuss the operational issues encountered in Hong Kong. With a view to relieve the shortage of manpower and demand of the healthcare system, suggestions of further enhancing the ability of volunteers and extending their scope of services in the home of elderly people are proposed. Pertinent issues in sustaining trained volunteers in the voluntary long-term care work are also presented.

THE ORIGIN OF VOLUNTEERISM

Many years ago, the religious groups such as the Christianity have been playing an important role to take care of the poor by providing them with food and other necessities because of their spiritual values. Members of the church started practicing voluntary work to look after the sick in hospitals or in their homes. They believe that the negative emotions of the patients such as pain, anxiety and despair would be alleviated by peace and hope after they have visited them. Therefore, churches have been participating hospital visitations and voluntary work up to present day (Williams, n.d.).

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Volunteers

Volunteers refer to people contributing their time and talent willingly for betterment of the society without financial gain. There are countless non-government and charity organisations involving more and more volunteers in their operations and services across the globe. Due to the aging population, the demand of healthcare service increases while the supply of labour force decreases. This group of passionate volunteers and people with potential can give a helping hand in long-term care services to the elderly people.

Volunteers are valued resources in providing services to many aspects in the community. It is believed that volunteers with appropriate training can offer more creditable assistance widely in many areas of long-term care and elderly services. They serve as an adjunct manpower to supplement the regular providers. Hence the contributions of volunteers, when organized and managed systematically, is a sustainable solution to providing the long-term care in an aging population.

Evolution of Volunteerism in Hong Kong

Under the funding of the Community Chest of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust and private donations, the Agency for Volunteer Service (AVS) was formed in 1970 to promote the voluntary work and dedicated to develop volunteerism in Hong Kong. AVS assists in referral services through a Central Membership System for people who are interested in voluntary works. Volunteers are matched and deployed according to their personal preference and talent with suitable services in a voluntary organisation. A development centre has been established to provide diversified training as well as enhancing the capacity of volunteers and voluntary organisations. More importantly, training can earn the trust and respect of both the service users and providers. It helps to build up a positive image of local volunteers. AVS is the pioneer in local volunteerism (Agency for Volunteer Service, n.d.).

In 1998, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) introduced the on-going cross-sectional scheme, “Volunteer Movement” to encourage the public to participate in voluntary work. The Steering Committee on Promotion of Volunteer Service was set up to formulate the strategy and direction of local voluntary development. Apart from offering the public a platform of multi-faceted opportunity of performing voluntary work, it gives volunteers recognition by developing a reward system. A volunteer information system has also been established (Social Welfare Department, 2005).

Moreover, four sub-committees were formed to devise action plans. Each of these sub-committees focuses on one of the following areas: students and youth, corporations, community organizations, promotion and publicity. With the division of work, resources can be utilised more efficiently without overlap. Besides, 11 district coordinating committees are organised under the SWD to co-ordinate service providers and to formulate proposals for the growth of volunteerism. The proposals have taken into consideration the characteristics of each district to give direction to the districts’ strategies and the allocation of their resources so that a greater impact of volunteerism can be made. Within the SWD, the Central Office for Volunteer Service was formed for facilitating the development of volunteerism with a series of promotional activities. Through the co-operation, voluntary work is promoted widely and effectively in the society (Volunteer Movement, n.d.).

In recent years, voluntary organisations become more and more important in the society especially when it comes to the welfare of the underprivileged and vulnerable groups. With the increasing demand for long-term care, the government and society have realised that the volunteer workforce can give help in meeting the demand and can promote the well-being of long-term care recipients in the community.

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