

MEDICAL REGISTRATION ORDINANCE (Chapter 161)

ORDER MADE BY THE INQUIRY PANEL OF
THE MEDICAL COUNCIL OF HONG KONG

DR WONG CHE TUNG (REGISTRATION NO.: M14341)

It is hereby notified that after due inquiry held on 12 January 2022 in accordance with section 21 of the Medical Registration Ordinance, Chapter 161 of the Laws of Hong Kong, the Inquiry Panel of the Medical Council of Hong Kong found Dr WONG Che Tung (Registration No.: M14341) guilty of the following charges:—

‘That in or about April 2019, he, being a registered medical practitioner, disregarded his professional responsibility to his patient (“the Patient”), in that he:—

- (a) failed to make a diagnosis of digital nerve injury of the Patient’s left thumb;*
- (b) failed to inform the Patient of the possibility of digital nerve injury of his left thumb; and/or*
- (c) failed to provide treatment option(s) to the Patient for the digital nerve injury of his left thumb.*

In relation to the facts alleged, either singularly or cumulatively, he has been guilty of misconduct in a professional respect.’

Dr WONG’s name has been included in the General Register from 2 July 2004 to the present. His name has never been included in the Specialist Register.

Briefly stated, the Patient consulted Dr WONG on 13 April 2019 after sustaining a cut injury to his left thumb at work in a construction site earlier in the afternoon.

Through his solicitor, Dr WONG indicated to the Inquiry Panel that he was not going to challenge the contents of the statutory declaration made by the Patient.

According to the Patient, Dr WONG took a look at the wound and asked him how he injured his left thumb. He told Dr WONG that he cut his left thumb hard with a sharp cutter. He further enquired if his tendon or nerve had been injured but Dr WONG merely replied that it was normal to have pain over the wound. Dr WONG then ordered his nurse to dress the wound and gave him tetanus vaccination. Dr WONG also ordered x-ray of his hand. He was discharged with medication for pain relief; and a follow-up appointment was scheduled on 15 April 2019.

On 15 April 2019, the Patient returned to see Dr WONG. According to the Patient, Dr WONG took a look at the wound and told him that the wound was recovering well. Then he enquired if there was any injury to his tendon or nerve but Dr WONG replied that there was none.

On 17 April 2019, the Patient returned to see Dr WONG. According to the Patient, Dr WONG took a look at the wound and told him that the wound was not recovering quick enough. Dr WONG also told him to take antibiotics for 5 days.

On 23 April 2019, the Patient returned to see Dr WONG. According to the Patient, Dr WONG took a look at the wound and told him that the wound had recovered well and there was no need for further follow-up. When he told Dr WONG that his left thumb was still painful and very numb, Dr WONG replied that he could give him a referral letter to consult an orthopaedic specialist. The material parts of the letter read as follows:—

‘Clinical Information

Left thumb injury by cutter

...

clo [complained of]: left thumb numbness

Please kindly assess his condition and provide expert management

...’

According to the Patient, owing to the increase in pain and numbness over his left thumb, he attended the Accident & Emergency Department (‘AED’) of the United Christian Hospital (‘UCH’) on 25 April 2019. The attending AED doctor told him that the nerve to his left thumb was severed and required surgical repair as soon as possible. Or else, the injury to the nerve would

become permanent. But since the wound had already healed up and this was not a case of emergency, he had to be referred to the Orthopaedics & Traumatology Department of UCH for further management.

According to the Patient, on 27 April 2019, he consulted a private orthopaedic surgeon, one Dr POON, who subsequently noted in his referral letter that the Patient *'has complete loss of sensation of the thumb on the radial side suggesting probably a complete tear of the digital nerve.'*

The Patient eventually underwent a surgery on his left thumb by another private surgeon, one Dr LEE, at the Baptist Hospital ('BH') later in the day on 27 April 2019. According to the medical records obtained from BH, the intra-operative finding by Dr LEE was *'partial tear of digital nerve under the wound with scar formation'*. The injured digital nerve was repaired and the Patient was referred to UCH for further management after discharge from BH on 28 April 2019.

The Patient later lodged complaint against Dr WONG with the Medical Council.

There was no dispute that the Patient sustained a cut injury to the digital nerve of his left thumb but Dr WONG never made the diagnosis in any of the 4 consultations with the Patient. It was also the unchallenged evidence of the Patient that no physical examination on the sensation of his left thumb had been done before the wound was dressed on each occasion.

In failing to make a diagnosis of digital nerve injury of the Patient's left thumb, Dr WONG had in view of the Inquiry Panel by his conduct fallen below the standards expected of registered medical practitioners in Hong Kong. Accordingly, Dr WONG was found guilty of misconduct in a professional respect as per disciplinary charge (a).

Knowing that the Patient cut his left thumb hard with a sharp cutter, Dr WONG ought in the view of the Inquiry Panel to be on the alert if there was any injury to the digital nerve. However, when being asked by the Patient again on 15 April 2019 if there was any injury to his tendon or nerve, Dr WONG replied that there was none.

When the Patient presented with persistent pain and numbness during the follow-up consultation on 23 April 2019, Dr WONG merely gave him a referral letter to see an orthopaedic specialist. And yet, Dr WONG never informed the Patient of the possibility of digital nerve injury of his left thumb.

In failing to inform the Patient of the possibility of digital nerve injury of his left thumb, Dr WONG had in view of the Inquiry Panel by his conduct fallen below the standards expected of registered medical practitioners in Hong Kong. Accordingly, Dr WONG was found guilty of misconduct in a professional respect as per disciplinary charge (b).

In view of the Inquiry Panel, any tear in the digital nerve causing significant loss of sensation should be promptly repaired. Or else, the damage to the digital nerve would become permanent. The Inquiry Panel agreed with the Secretary's expert witness, Dr YUEN, that Dr WONG ought to have discussed with the Patient about the treatment option of surgical repair of the digital nerve of his left thumb.

In failing to provide treatment option(s) to the Patient for the digital nerve injury of his left thumb, Dr WONG had in the view of the Inquiry Panel by his conduct fallen below the standards expected of registered medical practitioners in Hong Kong. Accordingly, Dr WONG was found guilty of misconduct in a professional respect as per disciplinary charge (c)

The Inquiry Panel was particularly concerned that Dr WONG never conducted physical examination on the sensation of the Patient's left thumb during the 4 consultations.

In this connection, the Inquiry Panel noted from reading the mitigation bundle that Dr WONG was a surgical trainee for 3 years; and he ought to be able to understand the role of physical examination in the management of the cut injury to the Patient's left thumb.

Taking into consideration the nature and gravity of Dr WONG's case and what the Inquiry Panel had heard and read in mitigation, the Inquiry Panel made a global order that Dr WONG's name be removed from the General Register for a period of 4 months. The Inquiry Panel further ordered that the removal order be suspended for a period of 24 months on condition that Dr WONG shall complete within 12 months CME courses relating to basic clinical skills and trauma management to the equivalent of 10 CME points and such courses had to be pre-approved by the Chairman of the Medical Council.

The aforesaid orders are published in the *Gazette* in accordance with section 21(5) of the Medical Registration Ordinance. The full decision of the Inquiry Panel of the

Medical Council is published in the official website of the Medical Council of Hong Kong (<http://www.mchk.org.hk>).

LAU Wan-ye, Joseph *Chairman, The Medical Council of Hong Kong*