

# Ombudsman probes utilisation of low-charge hospital beds in private hospitals

The following is issued on behalf of the Office of The Ombudsman:

The Ombudsman, Ms Winnie Chiu, today (July 10) announced a direct investigation to examine the Government's work in monitoring and promoting the utilisation of low-charge hospital beds in private hospitals and identify areas for improvement, if any.

Two private hospitals in Hong Kong are required to comply with the land grant conditions and provide no less than 20 per cent of their total beds as low-charge hospital beds. At present, the two hospitals provide a total of 164 low-charge beds. The Department of Health (DH) monitors the provision of low-charge beds by these two private hospitals to ensure their compliance with the relevant land grant conditions.

The relevant requirements stipulate that the daily hospital charges (including fees for the hospital bed, meals and nursing services) for a low-charge bed shall not exceed the maximum fee charged for a third-class bed in public hospitals, which is currently \$120 per day, while other hospital charges (such as fees for the operating theatre, laboratory tests, X-ray examinations and medication) shall not exceed half the fees for same services charged for a second-class bed in the private hospital concerned. The preliminary inquiry by the Office of The Ombudsman found that although the two private hospitals do provide low-charge beds as stipulated in the land grant conditions, there is still room for improvement in the utilisation rates of those beds.

Meanwhile, the Hospital Authority (HA) has signed agreements separately with the two aforementioned private hospitals allowing the HA to refer suitable public hospital patients to the two hospitals to use their low-charge beds during influenza surges. Patients referred only need to pay a fee equivalent to the basic hospital charges of public hospitals and the other fees would be borne by the HA. During the 2017 summer surge and the 2017-18 winter surge of influenza, the HA activated the referral agreements. However, only 35 and 25 patients were referred respectively by public hospitals. The small number of patients referred indicated that the existing referral mechanism failed to improve the utilisation rate of low-charge beds, and could hardly alleviate the strong demand for hospital beds in public hospitals.

In this light, The Ombudsman decided to initiate a direct investigation against the Food and Health Bureau, the DH and the HA. Ms Chiu said, "The demand for hospital beds in public hospitals is huge. Proper utilisation of low-charge beds in private hospitals should help ease the burden on the

public healthcare system. Our direct investigation aims to examine and explore how the Government can further enhance the utilisation of low-charge beds in private hospitals."

The Ombudsman now invites members of the public to give their views on the above topic in writing to the Office of The Ombudsman by August 11, 2019:

Address: 30/F, China Merchants Tower, Shun Tak Centre  
168-200 Connaught Road Central, Hong Kong

Fax: 2882 8149

Email: [complaints@ombudsman.hk](mailto:complaints@ombudsman.hk)

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## Red flags hoisted at several beaches

Attention TV/radio announcers:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible:

Here is an item of interest to swimmers.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department announced today (July 10) that due to big waves, red flags have been hoisted at Hung Shing Yeh Beach, Lo So Shing Beach, Pui O Beach, Upper Cheung Sha Beach, Lower Cheung Sha Beach and Tong Fuk Beach in Islands District. Beach-goers are advised not to swim at these beaches.

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## Government clarifies reports on social credit system

In response to claims made by Taiwan media reports and on some online platforms that the Mainland's social credit system will be implemented in Hong Kong, a Government spokesman today (July 9) clarified that such claims are totally unfounded.

The spokesman said, "Guangdong Province published a three-year action plan (2018-2020) for the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area on July 5, which mentioned, amongst other things, speeding up the establishment of the social credit system in Guangdong Province. The action plan will only be applicable to Guangdong Province. The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region will not implement the social credit system concerned in Hong Kong."

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## **Employee fined for violation of safety legislation**

A lorry driver was fined \$16,000 at Fanling Magistrates' Courts today (July 9) for violation of the Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance. The prosecution was launched by the Labour Department.

The case involved a fatal accident that occurred on December 6, 2018, at a construction site of the Liantang/Heung Yuen Wai Boundary Control Point. A worker, while engaging in asphalt laying preparation work inside a tunnel under construction, was knocked over and died when an unmanned lorry rolled backward.

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