

Government proposes ten enhanced measures to support persons in mental recovery or with mental health needs (with photo)

The Advisory Committee on Mental Health (ACMH), chaired by Mr Wong Yan-lung, SC, held an urgent meeting this evening (June 9) to explore ways to address mental health issues in a more integral, safe and comprehensive approach and to make recommendations to the Government in the light of the tragic incident on June 2. The Acting Secretary for Health, Dr Libby Lee, also attended the meeting and announced ten enhanced support measures proposed by the Government after the meeting.

Mr Wong Yan-lung, SC, stressed that only an extreme minority of patients with mental illnesses are violence-prone and may injure others due to relapse. Symptoms of mental disorders can be effectively managed through treatment and intervention. Many persons in mental recovery can therefore live a healthy and fulfilling life. Attributing such tragic incidents over simply to mental disorders will only keep the society further away from truth. It will not help resolve the problem but aggravate the stigmatisation against persons with mental health needs, deterring those in need from seeking assistance.

At the meeting, the Hospital Authority (HA) briefed members on the cross-sectoral mechanism currently in place to offer treatment and social support to persons with mental health needs. Under the mechanism which has been operating smoothly, visits and timely consultations are arranged by case managers and medical social workers to keep a close watch on the rehabilitation of patients, as well as to arrange prompt admission to hospital for treatment once a relapse is noted. At this stage, there is no sign of inadequacy in follow-up or oversight on symptoms due to resource or manpower constraints.

Nevertheless, the ACMH considered that the overall mental health services should be reviewed. The ACMH pointed out that the enhancement of overall mental health in the community involves not only healthcare but also support from other areas such as social welfare and education, and is highly related to the overall atmosphere of the society. As such, the society should overcome the stigma and discrimination against persons with mental disorders, continue to care for and support those with mental health needs, and to encourage them to seek help. The ACMH appealed to members of the public not to be unnecessarily fearful of persons with mental health needs, and should avoid the widespread circulation of incorrect information in relation to mental health. Otherwise, it would be difficult for the community to eliminate various misunderstanding and stereotypes of mental disorders.

Dr Libby Lee thanked members for actively expressing their views. She reiterated that the Government attaches great importance to the mental health of members of the public. Having considered the invaluable views from the ACMH, the Government proposed ten enhanced measures in a bid to offer more comprehensive support to persons in mental recovery who had a history of severe mental disorders and other persons with mental health needs.

Enhanced measures to support persons in mental recovery who had a history of severe mental disorders

- (1) The HA will enhance manpower with an aim to optimising the ratio of case manager under the Case Management Programme to patients with severe mental illness to no higher than 1:40 by the fourth quarter of this year
- (2) The HA will explore the wider use of newer oral drugs or injections with fewer side effect for psychiatric patients in need to facilitate better medication compliance of patients
- (3) The HA will set clearer targets for the median waiting time for new cases at psychiatric specialist outpatient clinics, with median waiting time for those triaged as Priority 1 (urgent) be kept within one week and that for Priority 2 (semi-urgent) be kept within four weeks
- (4) Enhance the communication in case management between the HA and the Social Welfare Department (SWD), including exploring more frequent exchanges on cases jointly handled by the HA and the SWD, so as to provide a more holistic and continuous support with a more comprehensive assessment on medical, emotional and family conditions, etc. of the person concerned
- (5) The HA will complete the review of the "Conditional Discharge" mechanism under the Mental Health Ordinance soon and will report the findings of the review to the ACMH next month. The Government will also invite the ACMH to explore the feasibility and effectiveness of the "Community Treatment Order", and make recommendations to the Government.

Enhanced measures to support other persons with mental health needs

- (1) Individual District Health Centres will explore the introduction of a pilot scheme to provide mental health assessment for members of the public in need, and collaborate with community organisations for providing follow-up, as well as early referral for high-risk cases
- (2) The SWD will enhance the services of Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness to strengthen support for persons with mental health needs, including strengthening early identification of persons with mental health needs and early intervention.
- (3) The SWD will explore enhancing the training of social workers in community mental health services units to improve their ability in handling complex cases
- (4) The Health Bureau (HKB) will expedite the implementation of setting up a mental health support hotline within this year, so as to consolidate different mental health services and to provide immediate support and referral services for members of the public with mental health needs
- (5) Strengthen the support for the mental health needs of specific groups (including low-income and ethnic minority families), so as to provide timely

support as well as early identification and assistance for cases in need. The HHB is actively liaising with non-government organisations to set up a service centre to provide emotional support and counselling for ethnic minorities, which is expected to commence operation within this year. Moreover, the Government will explore the possibility of leveraging the district network and service experience of "Care Teams" to participate in assisting and supporting the relevant measures

Dr Libby Lee pointed out that the Government will work with the ACMH closely in taking forward the aforementioned measures. She added that enhancement of mental health requires the joint effort and involvement of everyone on all fronts, and is an arduous task across bureaux and across different sectors. The Government will continue to provide multi-disciplinary services to persons with mental health needs and fully integrated and coherent mental health services to members of the public through collaboration and co-operation among the HHB, the Labour and Welfare Bureau, the Education Bureau, the Department of Health, the SWD, the HA, non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders in the community.