

Health Bureau responds to Consumer Council's recommendations on price transparency in healthcare

In view of media enquiries concerning the Consumer Council's recommendations on price transparency in healthcare, the Health Bureau today (March 6) gave the following response:

The Health Bureau welcomes the release of the Consumer Council's report entitled "Price Transparency in Healthcare: Fostering Consumer Trust and Value", which presents recommendations for improving the existing private healthcare sector and enhancing price transparency. As announced in the Chief Executive's 2024 Policy Address, the Government plans to consult the sector within this year to explore legislating for enhancing private healthcare price transparency. The Government will take into account the Consumer Council's report when formulating the relevant proposal for consultation purposes.

Hong Kong has a dual-track healthcare system that encompasses both the public and the private sectors. Public healthcare has long been acting as a safety net, while private healthcare offers more choices to citizens with higher affordability. The Government considers the private healthcare sector an integral part of Hong Kong's healthcare system. As such, enhancing the value efficiency of private healthcare and maintaining high-quality healthcare services are crucial to keeping Hong Kong at the forefront of global healthcare standards and developing the city into an international health and medical innovation hub.

However, there has always been an imbalance in resource deployment between public and private healthcare. Public healthcare services are heavily subsidised at nearly 98 per cent, catering for 90 per cent inpatient and specialist medical care in Hong Kong while employing only roughly half of the manpower of medical practitioners. In view of high inflation in private healthcare, enhancing private healthcare price transparency will enable citizens to become better informed about pricing and prepared for costs before making medical decisions, which builds greater confidence in using private healthcare services by citizens and alleviates the burden on public healthcare services.

In 2016, the Government, together with the Hong Kong Private Hospitals Association, rolled out a Pilot Programme for Enhancing Price Transparency for Private Hospitals. It has been voluntarily participated in by all private hospitals with three measures implemented, namely (1) publicising the fee schedules of major chargeable items; (2) providing budget estimates for patients receiving 30 common treatments/procedures; and (3) publicising historical billing statistics for 30 common treatments/procedures.

A number of improvements have been made to the Pilot Programme since its introduction. The Government has also set up a dedicated website (apps.orphf.gov.hk/Public/en) to publish statistics from all private hospitals, including annual discharge numbers for specified treatments/procedures, average length of stay, and actual billing data for the 50th and 90th percentiles of each specified treatment/procedure, facilitating public reference and comparison.

The Health Bureau is actively preparing for the consultation exercise on legislating for private healthcare price transparency, taking into account, among others, the content of the Consumer Council's report and the operational experience of the Pilot Programme, and will maintain liaison with various stakeholders to better uphold patient welfare in light of the actual operation of the private healthcare sector. The Health Bureau plans to announce the proposal for consultation purposes within this year.