

# LCQ14: Healthcare services for Islands District

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hok-fung and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (March 19):

Question:

It is learnt that the intake of the newly-built public housing estates in Tung Chung, namely Cheung Tung Estate and Chun Tung Estate, will commence progressively this year, and the population in the district is expected to increase by 30 000 or more within the year. On the other hand, there are views that the North Lantau Hospital (NLH), which has been serving the district for more than 11 years, has yet to be developed into a general hospital and only provides seven specialist outpatient services, making it necessary for some patients to travel a long distance to seek consultation at the Princess Margaret Hospital. Regarding the healthcare services for Islands District, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows if the Hospital Authority (HA) has plans to provide all of the 15 specialist services at NLH; if it has, of the timetable and the next specialist outpatient service to be provided at the hospital; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as it has been reported that Stage 1 of Phase 2 development of the NLH project was completed last year, whether the Government knows when HA plans to commence Stage 2 of the development project; if so, of the details;

(3) whether the Government has assessed the demand for healthcare services of the additional population brought about by the two aforesaid newly-built public housing estates in Tung Chung, and the time needed for residents moving into these two estates to arrange for a change of the cluster hospitals they attend;

(4) whether it knows the current and projected staff establishment and the vacancy rates of NLH for the next three years, together with a breakdown by specialist outpatient service; of the number of days on which each specialist outpatient service is currently provided at the hospital per week; whether it has assessed if such specialist outpatient services can meet the demand of existing patients; and

(5) given that while the Government has proposed in the 2024 Policy Address to develop tourism in the Ex-Lamma Quarry area, it is learnt that clinics in the district cannot provide round-the-clock services at present, whether the Government will enhance the services of North Lamma General Outpatient Clinic, so as to cope with the demand arising from future development; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Hospital Authority (HA), the consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Hok-fung is as follows:

(1), (3) and (4) The HA plans and develops various public healthcare services on a cluster basis, taking into account a number of factors, including the increase of service demand arising from population growth and demographic changes, rising prevalence of chronic diseases, technology advancement, manpower supply as well as service arrangements of the various clusters. The HA monitors the utilisation of various healthcare services and plans future hospital services according to the population projection parameters of various districts of Hong Kong and the development plans of the Government.

Currently, Tung Chung falls within the catchment area of the Kowloon West Cluster (KWC). The five hospitals in the KWC, namely the Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH), the Caritas Medical Centre (CMC), the Yan Chai Hospital (YCH), the Kwai Chung Hospital and the North Lantau Hospital (NLTH), provide comprehensive clinical services to the residents of the district. Based on the Projections of Population Distribution 2023-2031 of the Planning Department, the population of the Tung Chung New Town is about 150 000 in 2025. Under the First Hospital Development Plan (HDP) which is currently being implemented and the Second HDP which is being planned, the Government and the HA will, having taken the healthcare service needs brought by the projected population growth in the relevant districts (including the Tung Chung New Town Extension) into consideration, take forward and plan hospital development projects to increase the number of beds and other healthcare facilities. The HA will also keep in view the utilisation of healthcare services in the KWC to conduct cluster planning and adjust the service provision in the cluster in accordance with the latest projection of service demand, with a view to meeting the healthcare service needs of their patients (including the residents of Tung Chung).

If residents who have newly moved to Tung Chung wish to receive medical consultations in hospitals of the KWC due to personal choice, travel distance to/from hospitals or physical condition, etc., they may apply for the HA's referral services according to their own needs. The HA will process such applications as soon as practicable.

With regard to the manpower establishment and the provision of specialist out-patient services in the NLTH, the HA provides healthcare services through multi-disciplinary teams comprising doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and supporting grade staff. At present, all the planned projects for Phase 1 development of the NLTH have been put into service, and necessary staff have been recruited according to operational needs. As at February 28, 2025, the NLTH has about 800 staff and 30 vacancies across different staff groups. Arrangements for the manpower establishment of the NLTH in future are made in accordance with the HA annual plan, which is

formulated based on service needs. The HA will assess the manpower needs from time to time and deploy manpower flexibly to meet service and operational needs.

The NLTH is currently providing the following specialist out-patient services with the service frequency as below:

Specialist out-patient service	Number of days of service in a week
Medicine and Geriatrics	4
Surgery	1
Urology	1
Orthopaedics and Traumatology	4
Paediatrics and Adolescent Medicine	3
Gynaecology	1
Psychiatry	2

Besides, all beds in NLTH have been commissioned. As at December 2024, the bed number at the hospital is 180.

To ensure the effective use of resources and that the service volume of individual specialist out-patient services are sufficient for the healthcare staff's accumulation of clinical experience to ensure the quality of services, the various hospitals in the same cluster will provide different and complementary services to provide comprehensive and optimal services to residents in the cluster's catchment area. The hospitals in KWC will provide the NLTH with the appropriate service support, such as patients requiring emergency surgeries or having complex medical conditions will be supported by PMH or transferred to PMH for further treatment. Support will be provided to special cases of the Eye as well as the Ear, Nose and Throat specialities by the CMC and the YCH respectively. The KWC will review and plan the clinical services of the five hospitals in the cluster (including the NLTH) from time to time and adjust the service provision as necessary.

(2) NLTH Development Phase 2, Stage 1 project, i.e. the Hospital Authority Supporting Services Centre (HASSC), is amongst the projects under the First HDP. Following the funding approval by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council in 2020, the construction works commenced in the fourth quarter of the same year. The HASSC was completed in 2024 and will commission in phases starting from March 2025. It will provide services including laundry, patient meals, critical personal protective equipment and key linen items storage, and a data centre for supporting the operations of NLTH and other public hospitals.

As for the next stage of development for the NLTH, with the changes in the planning and development situation of Hong Kong, the Health Bureau and

the HA are reviewing the Second HDP. Amongst others, in view of the planning and development strategies for the whole territory and regions announced by the Planning Department, including the "Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030" and the Northern Metropolis Development Strategy, as well as the corresponding population projections of Hong Kong including the latest changes in overall population, its distribution and demographics, the Health Bureau and the HA have to make reference to the latest future planning of the whole territory (including the development concepts of the Northern Metropolis), population statistics, population distribution and demographics projections of various districts, and the population policy and talent attraction initiatives of the Government, adopt a planning horizon of up to 2040 and beyond for the Second HDP, and to project the healthcare service demand and consider the supply and conditions of the land required, for optimising the Second HDP.

The Government also considers factors such as the needs for and cost-effectiveness of renovation, refurbishment, redevelopment or addition of facilities for individual hospitals; and the convenience of access of the public for healthcare services under various major transport infrastructure development plans, etc., for determining the distribution, scale and priority, etc. of various hospital development projects under the Second HDP. Upon completion of the review, the Government will announce the details of the Second HDP in due course.

(5) Currently, the public healthcare services on the Lamma Island is mainly provided by the Hong Kong East Cluster of the HA. The HA has two general out-patient clinics (GOPCs) on the Lamma Island, namely the North Lamma GOPC and the Sok Kwu Wan GOPC. The North Lamma GOPC provides service from Mondays to Fridays during the daytime and on Saturday mornings, with a doctor stationed at the clinic; whereas the Sok Kwu Wan GOPC provides service from Mondays to Saturdays during the daytime, with a doctor stationed at the clinic from Mondays to Fridays and a registered nurse providing nursing and support services during the remaining service hours.

The GOPCs mainly provide service to chronic disease patients with stable medical conditions and episodic disease patients with relatively mild symptoms, and are not intended for provision of emergency services. If any resident of the island encounters emergency situations, the clinic staff will handle the matter according to the contingency mechanism. The clinic nurse will, based on the condition of the patient, contact the accident and emergency (A&E) department and provide appropriate treatment/care to the patient upon the doctor's advice, or contact other government department(s) for assistance for the transferral of the patient to the A&E department, to ensure that patients with severe and acute symptoms will receive the appropriate treatment and support.

Due to the geographical location of the Lamma Island, apart from the provision of general out-patient services, the HA also provides 24-hour first-aid services by a registered nurse at the North Lamma GOPC to ensure that the residents there can receive immediate first-aid services outside the service hours of the GOPCs.

While planning for and developing the provision of public primary healthcare services, the Government needs to take into account a number of factors, including the delivery model of the primary healthcare service, demographic changes, distribution of the target groups, the provision of and demand for primary healthcare services within the district, etc. Having regard to the cost-effectiveness of providing overnight general out-patient service and the additional demand for healthcare manpower, the HA has no plan to provide overnight general out-patient service on Lamma Island at this stage based on the consideration of effective use of healthcare resources.

In the long run, the HA will dovetail with the Government's overall development policies, continue to closely monitor the demand for public primary healthcare services in the district and plan for and adjust the services with reference to the demand, so as to provide suitable primary healthcare services to the residents in the district.