

## LCQ6: Expansion of United Christian Hospital

Following is a question by the Hon Tang Ka-piu and a reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (May 14):

Question:

There are views pointing out that the expansion project of United Christian Hospital (UCH) has been delayed since its launch in 2015, and that the design specifications do not meet the latest medical requirements. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the progress of the aforesaid expansion project and the exact date when the expanded facilities will officially commence operation; whether the completion date of the project is later than originally planned; if so, of the main reasons for that;

(2) as there are views that the design of the renovated buildings and facilities (e.g. height of storeys and load bearing standards, etc) under the aforesaid expansion project is different from the specifications of new hospitals nowadays and may not meet the storage or operational requirements of some medical devices, whether the Government knows if the Hospital Authority has put in place remedial measures or make appropriate arrangements in this regard; and

(3) whether the playground site adjacent to UCH be retained for use in the next phase of the hospital's expansion project; if so, of the specific boundary of the site and the timetable for planning and survey works; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Established in 1973, the United Christian Hospital (UCH) is a major acute general hospital in the Kowloon East Cluster (KEC). It provides 24-hour accident and emergency (A&E) services and a range of specialist out-patient, inpatient, ambulatory, extended care and community medical services. Together with the Tseung Kwan O Hospital and the Haven of Hope Hospital in the cluster, the UCH provides comprehensive clinical services to the residents of the Kwun Tong and Sai Kung districts. To meet the ever-increasing healthcare service demand of the two districts, the Government obtained funding approval from the Legislative Council to carry out the main works of the expansion project of the UCH in 2020, which is one of the 16 projects under the First Hospital Development Plan (HDP).

Having consulted the Hospital Authority (HA), the reply to various parts of the question raised by the Hon Tang Ka-piu is as follows:

(1) The UCH expansion project will not only bring about additional diagnostic and medical facilities to comprehensively improve the ambulatory care services and integrated healthcare services, but also provide a new oncology centre and an additional 560 beds as well as five operating theatres. The area of the expanded A&E Department will be increased to more than 250 per cent, from the existing 1 600 square metres to 4 240 square metres.

The main works of the expansion project commenced in September 2020 and were originally planned for completion by 2024. Due to some delays, the Ambulatory Block is now anticipated to be progressively completed starting from the end of 2025 and to commence operation in phases in mid-2026 the earliest.

The expansion project of the UCH involves in-situ expansion and redevelopment. During the works period, on-going clinical operations have to be maintained to provide service and the new block has to interface with the existing hospital premises. As such, adjustments are required to address various construction constraints during the works period. The works progress is therefore affected and deviates from the previously over-optimistically estimated completion time. In addition, other major reasons of the delay can be summarised in the following three points:

(a) Site constraints

The limited space and vehicular access at UCH, the extensive and complex nature of the project, its location in an old district and the adjacent slope, together with the numerous underground utility pipes and facilities and the difference between their actual and expected locations have resulted in modifications to the design from time to time. The existing underground utilities were also needed to accommodate the actual ground conditions.

(b) Unsatisfactory performance of the consultants and the contractors of the works

The HA has repeatedly urged the consultants and contractors of the works to take measures to catch up with works progress. If it is proved that the delay was caused by inappropriate design or works arrangements, the HA will follow up in accordance with the terms of the contracts.

(c) Impact from the COVID-19 epidemic and inclement weather

The contractors' deployment of manpower and supplies of materials had long been affected by the COVID-19 since the commencement of works in September 2020. The severe epidemic situation during the fifth wave of the epidemic in early 2022 had hindered the progress of the works project. Besides, major exterior works were also affected by inclement weather, resulting in the extension of the overall construction period.

The expansion project involves in-situ redevelopment, with clinical services being maintained under sub-optimal conditions. I would like to express my gratitude towards all healthcare staff of the UCH and KEC for their patient-oriented spirit in providing high-quality services to the

patients unwaveringly, as well as towards the public for their understanding and patience towards the inconveniences during the works period. The HA will continue to maintain close communication with District Councils and the community and report the related works progress and service developments in a timely manner.

(2) In respect of hospital works projects involving in-situ redevelopment or expansion, as the projects need to be undertaken amidst on-going hospital operations with new block(s) interfacing with existing portions of hospital premises, constraints would be imposed to the relevant designs and the works. Such constraints, however, are not insurmountable. The HA has been taking measures to address them. In setting up healthcare services and facilities in the UCH, existing conditions and constraints, as well as the operational needs have been taken into consideration while new medical facilities are set up in accordance with the relevant standards and specifications, with the structure of the building reinforced according to the requirements in the Building (Construction) Regulation if necessary to ensure that such facilities can operate and meet service needs.

(3) The Government announced in 2018 that it has invited the HA to commence planning for the Second HDP, which was to be implemented to meet the service demand up to 2036. With the changes in the planning and development strategies in Hong Kong and the population policy of the Government, as well as the latest corresponding change in population projections in Hong Kong, the Health Bureau and the HA are currently reviewing the Second HDP by extending the planning horizon to up to 2041 and beyond to project the healthcare services demand. The Health Bureau and the HA also consider the supply of the land required, various major transport infrastructure development plans, etc, as well as the development need of individual hospitals and its cost-effectiveness for optimising the Second HDP, so as to determine the distribution, scale and priority, etc of various hospital development projects under the Second HDP.

In the light of the experience gained under the First HDP, the Government will, in the Second HDP, strive to implement hospital development projects on clear sites as far as practicable (such as a composite development in an adjacent government site of existing hospitals) so as to optimise the development potential of the projects, minimise the impact on existing hospital operations and enhance the cost-effectiveness of the redevelopment. In the case of UCH, exploring the use of the adjoining recreational ground as a decanting site for further expansion is an option that may be considered.

After the completion of the review, the Government will announce the details of the Second HDP at an appropriate juncture.

Thank you, President.