

LCQ8: Non-emergency ambulance transfer service

Following is a question by the Hon Lam Chun-sing and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (June 28):

Question:

There are views pointing out that the number of person-times using the non-emergency ambulance transfer service (NEATS) of the Hospital Authority (HA) has been on the rise in recent years. Non-emergency ambulances often transport multiple patients at the same time, which, coupled with the difficulties in parking encountered in some places, has caused some patients to suffer waiting for several hours before they can reach their destinations. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows the average number of persons transported by HA's NEATS in each of the past five years, with a breakdown by the type of patients transported (e.g. patients living at home, in residential care homes for the elderly and in residential care homes for persons with disabilities) and hospital cluster;

(2) whether it knows the (i) staffing establishment, (ii) strength, (iii) wastage rate and (iv) number of new recruits of NEATS attendants in various hospital clusters in each of the past five years;

(3) as it is learnt that non-emergency ambulances often encounter difficulties when entering public or private housing estates and private car parks (including places under the management of the Housing Department (HD) and the Link Real Estate Investment Trust (Link REIT)), including being requested to park at loading areas and spending long time paying parking fees, etc, thus affecting the quality of transport service, whether the Government will enhance communication and co-ordination with the HD and the Link REIT, and study turning non-emergency ambulances to special purpose vehicles, so as to facilitate the transport of patients and speed up the transport; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) as there are views that the ageing of the population and the development of quite a number of new areas in the future will result in a continuous rise in the demand for NEATS and a substantial increase in the workload of NEATS attendants, whether it knows if the HA has considered increasing the number of non-emergency ambulances and raising the remuneration packages of NEATS attendants to retain talents and attract talents to join the service; if the HA has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Housing Bureau and the Transport and Logistics Bureau and the Hospital Authority (HA), the consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Lam Chun-sing is as follows:

(1) The HA's non-emergency ambulance transfer service (NEATS) mainly provides point-to-point transfer service for public hospital patients who are unable to use other transportation means (e.g. bus, taxi, vehicle of elderly homes or Rehabus, etc.) due to mobility disability or mental/sensory impairment. The clinical conditions of the patients using this service should meet certain criteria such as being bed-ridden or requiring constant oxygen supply. Generally speaking, healthcare staff will confirm with eligible patients and their families/carers if use of the NEATS is required and make appropriate arrangements accordingly.

The total number of patient trips served by the NEATS and among which, the number of patient trips serving discharged patients over the past five years are set out in the following table:

Year	Total number of patient trips served (including hospital admission, transfer, discharge and medical consultation)	Number of patient trips serving discharged patients
2018-19	552 729	189 960
2019-20	532 134	193 731
2020-21	425 263	186 193
2021-22	518 005	211 427
2022-23	562 173	224 690

Note: In view of the emergence of the COVID-19 epidemic in Hong Kong since early 2020, the HA adjusted its services in response to the epidemic. This should be taken into account when comparing the throughput of services provided by the HA across the years.

The HA does not maintain the statistical data by the types of patients served.

(2) The manpower statistics of the NEATS over the past five years are set out in the following table:

Year	Number of staff (i) (As of March 31 each year)	Full-time attrition (wastage) number (ii)	Intake number (iii)
2018-19	704	60	107
2019-20	798	78	173
2020-21	880	67	153

2021-22	942	87	143
2022-23	981	78	121

(i) The manpower figures above are calculated on a full-time equivalent basis including permanent, contract and temporary staff in the HA.

(ii) Attrition (Wastage) includes all types of cessation of service from the HA for permanent and contract staff on headcount basis.

(iii) Intake refers to the total number of permanent and contract staff joining the HA on headcount basis during the period. Transfer, promotion and staff movement within the HA are not included.

(3) Regarding the parking arrangement of the HA's non-emergency ambulances in the public housing estates under the Hong Kong Housing Authority, according to the prevailing policy, relevant vehicles entering the estates for boarding and alighting of patients will be provided with one hour of free parking. In addition, depending on the design and usage of the roads in individual estates, such vehicles may be arranged to park in a designated space.

As for the application for special purpose vehicle, according to the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374), "special purpose vehicle" means a motor vehicle designed, constructed or adapted primarily for use other than the carriage on a road of goods, drivers or passengers. Before applying for the relevant vehicle license from the Transport Department, applicants must first obtain an approval from the relevant government department(s) for the purpose of the vehicle. The design and structure of the vehicle must also comply with the requirements of the relevant legislations.

Converting the HA's non-emergency ambulances to special purpose vehicles could not directly improve operational efficiency, and driving a special purpose vehicle requires a separate license, which may in turn increase difficulties in operation and recruitment of drivers. Considering that the existing non-emergency ambulances of the HA are generally sufficient to meet the service needs, the HA has no plan to apply for conversion of non-emergency ambulances to special purpose vehicles.

(4) The HA attaches great importance to the manpower situation in public hospitals and launched a series of measures to attract and retain manpower, including strengthening recruitment of full-time and part-time staff, further employment of suitable staff beyond retirement through the policy of Extending Employment Beyond Retirement as well as provision of better training and promotion opportunities for existing staff, in order to further retain manpower. Regarding the manpower in respect of NEATS, the HA had initiated discussion with and listened to the views of relevant stakeholders in March 2023, and is currently actively considering in detail various aspects of the matter and studying the feasibility of the relevant proposals. Among these, the HA plans to add eight non-emergency ambulances and 160 NEATS posts in 2023-24 in order to meet the service needs. The numbers of non-emergency ambulances over the past five years are set out in the following table:

Year	Number of non-emergency ambulances
2018-19	231
2019-20	238
2020-21	262
2021-22	276
2022-23	276

LCQ7: Combating “quick money-making” crimes

Following is a question by the Hon Ma Fung-kuok and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (June 28):

Question:

It has been reported that following the full resumption of normal travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland as well as the rest of the world, various types of "quick money-making" crimes (e.g. pickpocketing, snatching, burglary and deception) have been on the increase in Hong Kong in recent months. Some Mainland tourist victims have criticised that the law and order of Hong Kong has deteriorated. Suspecting that some people have targeted Mainland tourists when committing crimes, such tourists have called upon Mainland tourists to be cautious and have even advised Mainland residents not to visit Hong Kong. On the other hand, some members of the public have claimed that some of these offenders are non-Hong Kong residents and are even tourists. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has compiled statistics to see if the aforesaid "quick money-making" crimes or other types of crimes have increased significantly since January this year, and set out in a table the number of relevant crimes by month;

(2) among the victims of the crimes mentioned in (1), of the respective numbers of Hong Kong residents and non-Hong Kong residents (with a breakdown by place of origin);

(3) of the detection rate of the crimes mentioned in (1); among the people arrested, the ratio of Hong Kong residents to non-Hong Kong residents; whether the non-Hong Kong residents include refugees and asylum seekers stranded in Hong Kong; if so, of their numbers and proportion; and

(4) whether measures are in place to enhance the protection for the safety of tourists and combat the aforesaid "quick money-making" crimes (including

reminding tourists to stay alert of suspicious persons and increasing the number of patrols at relevant crime blackspots), and whether it will release on a regular basis the number of relevant crimes committed by tourists, so as to avoid deliberate dissemination of unproven information by some people to stir up conflicts between members of the public and tourists?

Reply:

President,

There is no definition of "quick cash" crimes legally. However, these crimes generally share the following characteristics: opportunistic in nature; committed in public places; and the stolen properties are usually cash or other items that can be easily sold for cash. Combating "quick cash" crimes is one of the operational priorities of the Police in 2023. The Police will strategically deploy resources to problematic areas and take proactive measures against emerging trends of "quick cash" crimes.

In consultation with the Police, the reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) to (3) With the society gradually resumed to normalcy as the COVID-19 pandemic eased, in the first five months of 2023, various types of crimes registered an increase compared with the same period of 2022. This is mainly due to the extremely low number of traditional crimes recorded in the same period last year when the fifth wave of pandemic was at its peak, during which stringent social distancing measures were in place and social activities were largely reduced. In fact, when compared with the same period in 2019 before the pandemic outbreak, apart from the significant increase in deception cases, the numbers of other types of crimes related to "quick cash" have remained similar or even dropped slightly in the first five months of 2023.

To monitor the situation and trend of "quick cash" crimes, for statistical purposes, the Police consider the situation of eight crimes with more characteristics of "quick cash" crimes, namely shop theft, pickpocketing, miscellaneous theft, snatching, street robbery, taxi robbery, "head bashing" robbery and street deceptions as indicators. A comparison between the numbers of these crimes and burglary mentioned in the question from January to May 2023 and in the same periods in 2019 and 2022, the relevant detection rates and the number of people arrested are at Annex. The Police do not have a breakdown of the victims of the crimes by place of origin.

(4) The Police strive to combat crimes related to "quick cash" such as robbery, snatching. To this end, the Police have been mounting intelligence-led operations and have deployed resources flexibly to step up patrols so as to enhance the deterrent effect. Since mid-June this year, the manpower of uniformed officers has been increased in various districts. Insofar as permitted by work arrangements, plain clothes officers are assigned to high profile patrols on the street, especially in crowded places, to stop and

search suspicious persons. In addition, the Police have been actively conveying anti-crime messages to the general public and tourists through anti-crime promotional activities, encouraging them to take good care of their personal belongings and report any suspicious persons or vehicles to the Police without hesitation.

On May 16 this year, the Police also launched a brand-new one-stop website "SafeCity.HK" (www.safecity.hk) to provide the public with information and knowledge about crime prevention, including prevention of theft, and advise them of the ways to seek help. Besides serving Hong Kong citizens, the website also offers "Tips for Tourists", providing practical information and anti-crime messages for tourists to travel safely in Hong Kong.

The Police's website has been regularly releasing crime statistics, which include the number of visitors from the Mainland or other places who are arrested for having committed offences.

Tender results of re-opening of 15-year Government Bonds under Institutional Bond Issuance Programme

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

â€‹The Hong Kong Monetary Authority, as representative of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (HKSAR Government), announced that a tender of 15-year Government Bonds through the re-opening of existing 15-year Government Bond (issue number 15GB3801) under the Institutional Bond Issuance Programme was held today (June 28).

A total of HK\$0.5 billion 15-year Government Bonds were offered today. A total of HK\$2.212 billion tender applications were received. The bid-to-cover ratio, i.e. the ratio of the amount of bonds applied for over the amount of bonds issued, is 4.42. The average price accepted is 96.97, implying an annualised yield of 4.057 per cent.

HKSAR Government Institutional Bond Issuance Programme Government Bond tender results

Tender results of the re-opening of 15-year Government Bonds under the Institutional Bond Issuance Programme:

Tender Date : June 28, 2023

Issue Number : 15GB3801 (Re-open)
Stock Code : 4258 (HKGB 3.74 3801)
Issue and Settlement Date : June 29, 2023
Tenor : 15-year
Maturity Date : January 12, 2038
Coupon Rate : 3.74%

Amount Applied : HK\$2.212 billion
Amount Allotted : HK\$0.5 billion
Bid-to-Cover Ratio* : 4.42
Average Price Accepted (Yield) : 96.97 (4.057%)
Lowest Price Accepted (Yield) : 96.00 (4.150%)
Pro-rata Ratio : About 23%
Average Tender Price (Yield) : 95.16 (4.231%)

* Ratio of the amount of bonds applied for over the amount of bonds issued.

[UGC establishes Fund for Innovative Technology-in-Education](#)

â€‹The following is issued on behalf of the University Grants Committee:

The University Grants Committee (UGC), with support from its Quality Assurance Council (QAC), today (June 28) announced the launch of the Fund for Innovative Technology-in-Education (FITE) with a funding allocation of \$100 million. The FITE aims to provide an impetus for universities to harness innovative and breakthrough technologies in transforming pedagogies and enriching student learning experiences, and to nurture a digitally competent and technologically responsible generation, for the future success of their students in the digital economy.

With the advent of generative artificial intelligence, innovative and breakthrough technologies have presented new challenges and enormous opportunities for transforming pedagogies and student learning experiences. At the same time, the widespread adoption of technologies, such as Web3, may pave way for closer academia-industry collaboration in offering more authentic learning experiences for students. While it is widely acknowledged that digital competency plays a significant role in economic restructuring,

there is also growing awareness of the ethical and social issues arising from the use of innovative technologies. In response to these changes, the UGC, with support from the QAC, launched the FITE to support experimental and exploratory endeavours of universities in enhancing their teaching and learning.

The UGC-funded universities are welcome to utilise the FITE for different initiatives under the following four key themes (see Annex for details):

1. Driving transformation in pedagogies, curriculum, assessment and student development;
2. Advancing digital competency for all;
3. Promoting technological social responsibilities and academic integrity; and
4. Fostering academia-industry collaboration for authentic learning experience.

In addition, universities may make use of the funding for other initiatives aiming at advancing the use of technology in teaching and learning. The FITE allocation includes \$20 million specifically for inter-institutional collaborative activities.

The Chairman of the UGC, Mr Tim Lui, said, "The rapid advancement of innovative and breakthrough technologies promises unprecedented opportunities for transforming teaching and learning. Integrating technology and its associated social issues in every aspect of teaching and learning is strategically significant for students, universities, various industries and our economy as a whole. I encourage all universities to seize the opportunity and move ahead to ensure that the quality of educational experience offered by the UGC-funded universities stays at the forefront both locally and internationally."

The universities may utilise the funding to take forward various initiatives over the next three years. In this regard, the UGC Secretariat has invited all universities to submit their work plans and detailed proposals.

EPD convictions in May

Forty-five convictions were recorded in May 2023 for breaches of legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Department.

Four of the convictions were under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance,

six were under the Noise Control Ordinance, 11 were under the Public Cleansing and Prevention of Nuisances Regulation, one was under the Product Eco-responsibility Ordinance, 20 were under the Waste Disposal Ordinance and three were under the Water Pollution Control Ordinance.

A company was fined \$20,000, which was the heaviest fine in May, for contravening the provisions of a licence.