

Announcement of first batch of recognised medical qualifications under Medical Registration Ordinance

In accordance with the Medical Registration Ordinance (the Ordinance), the Registrar of Medical Practitioners (i.e. the Director of Health) announced today (April 27) the first batch of medical qualifications (see Annex) recognised by the Special Registration Committee (SRC).

After the Medical Registration (Amendment) Ordinance 2021 came into effect upon gazettal on October 29, 2021, non-locally trained doctors who possess recognised medical qualifications, subject to their fulfilment of certain criteria, may apply for special registration to practise in the public healthcare institutions (i.e. the Hospital Authority (HA), the Department of Health (DH), the University of Hong Kong and the Chinese University of Hong Kong) in Hong Kong. After serving for a certain period, obtaining recognised specialist qualifications and passing the assessment, they will be granted full registration to practise in Hong Kong. For non-locally trained medical graduates who possess the recognised medical qualifications but have yet to undergo internship outside Hong Kong, subject to their fulfilment of relevant criteria, they may take the Licensing Examination of the Medical Council of Hong Kong (MCHK) in order to apply for special registration to practise in the public healthcare institutions in Hong Kong. They may also obtain full registration after meeting the requirements applicable to all special registration doctors.

In November 2021, the SRC was established under the MCHK in accordance with the amended Ordinance to determine the list of recognised medical qualifications after reviewing programmes offered by non-local medical schools with quality comparable to those provided by the two medical schools in Hong Kong. The SRC will submit the list to the Registrar of Medical Practitioners for promulgation.

Under the Ordinance, when determining the list of recognised medical qualifications, the SRC will consider and recommend a medical qualification that fulfils the following criteria:

- (a) that is at the level of degree or higher;
- (b) that is awarded by a body broadly comparable to any local university awarding medical qualifications in terms of international rankings; and
- (c) that is broadly comparable to the medical qualifications awarded by any local university in terms of:
 - (i) curriculum of the programmes leading to the medical qualifications;
 - (ii) medium of instruction of the programmes; and
 - (iii) any other aspects the SRC considers appropriate.

In order that the list of recognised medical qualifications could be

determined early, the SRC has engaged the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications to support the relevant work. After detailed examination, the SRC has earlier submitted to the Registrar of Medical Practitioners the first batch of 27 medical qualifications recommended for recognition. Meanwhile, the SRC is pressing ahead with the assessment of other non-local medical programmes with a view to submitting the remaining medical qualifications to be recognised in batches as soon as possible.

The Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, said, "I am very grateful to the SRC Chairperson, Professor Grace Tang, and all of the members for their hard work in the past few months, which has resulted in the initial achievements in determining the list of recognised medical qualifications. I am confident that under the leadership of Professor Tang, the SRC will continue to discharge its statutory duties effectively and complete the task of determining the full list within this year.

"Given the current shortage of doctors in the public healthcare system, the announcement of the first batch of recognised medical qualifications is timely for qualified non-locally trained doctors to come to serve in the public healthcare institutions in Hong Kong through special registration as soon as possible. For students who intend to study medicine outside Hong Kong, they may refer to the list when making their choices for further studies. The Government will continue to enhance promotion on various registration pathways under the Ordinance through the Economic and Trade Offices, including conducting webinars with Hong Kong doctors and medical students in the respective places by the Food and Health Bureau, the HA and the DH, so as to encourage more qualified non-locally trained doctors to practise in Hong Kong."

The list of the first batch of recognised medical qualifications will be gazetted on April 29 and will take effect on the same day. It will be submitted to the Legislative Council for negative vetting on May 4.

LCQ10: Protective measures against extreme weather at coastal locations

Following is a question by the Hon Edward Leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (April 27):

Question:

The Civil Engineering and Development Department engaged consultants in 2019 to commission the Coastal Hazards Study to comprehensively review the

condition of low-lying coastal or windy locations, and to carry out the relevant investigations of storm surges and waves in order to assess the impacts of extreme weather on these locations. In addition, based on the situation during the onslaught of typhoons in the past, the Government has identified three locations vulnerable to seawater inundation due to overtopping waves (overtopping wave spots). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the progress of the aforesaid study, and whether it will make public the study findings;

(2) of the respective numbers of exceedances of the alert water level recorded at the three overtopping wave spots in each of the past three years;

(3) given that the Government has earlier on carried out improvement works at the overtopping wave spots at South Horizons and Tseung Kwan O South, whether it has plans to build breakwaters or carry out improvement works at the overtopping wave spot at Heng Fa Chuen; if so, of the timetable;

(4) given that the inability of seawalls to withstand waves during the onslaught of typhoons could possibly result in casualties, whether the Government will assist or subsidise the owners of the private lands concerned in building breakwaters or carrying out improvement works, so as to safeguard the safety of the public; and

(5) as the Government has indicated in Hong Kong's Climate Action Plan 2050 that it plans to implement improvement works and formulate management measures for some of the existing low-lying coastal or windy locations in order of priority, of the details of the priority accorded to the locations concerned?

Reply:

President,

The geographical location of Hong Kong makes it susceptible to weather-related threats such as tropical cyclones, rainstorms and storm surges. In particular, some relatively low-lying or windy locations along the coast are vulnerable to extreme storm surges or breaking waves, resulting in situations of sea water inundation or damage to coastal facilities, etc. Threats induced by extreme weather will become more frequent and severe under the climate change. The Government is very concerned about this matter. In 2019, the Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD) engaged consultants to commission the Coastal Hazards under Climate Change and Extreme Weather and Formulation of Improvement Measures – Feasibility Study (Coastal Hazards Study) to comprehensively review the impacts of storm surges and waves on coastal low-lying or windy locations under extreme weather and climate change.

In addition, based on the situation during the passage of severe or super typhoons in the past, the Drainage Services Department has identified three overtopping wave spots, namely Tseung Kwan O South, South Horizons and

Heng Fa Chuen, and other storm surge spots. It has also installed gauging stations to monitor the sea water level such that contingency measures could be put in place as soon as possible.

Responses to the questions raised by the Hon Leung are hereby provided as follows:

- (1) The CEDD announced on April 7 this year the Coastal Hazards Study, and uploaded the executive summary of study report to the departmental website for public viewing.
- (2) No water level exceeding alert level has been recorded at the gauging stations of the three overtopping wave spots since their commission in 2020.
- (3), (4) and (5) During the period from 2019 to 2020, the Government constructed planter walls and flood barriers at Heng Fa Chuen Playground to alleviate the flooding caused by the influx of overtopping wave water to the concerned area. The Government has been maintaining close communication with the management office of Heng Fa Chuen to provide them with technical advice on the installation of demountable flood barriers at the entrances of their car parks and residential building blocks; and the relevant works have been completed at Heng Fa Chuen.

To comprehensively review the impacts of storm surges and waves on the coastal areas, the Coastal Hazards Study adopted a risk management approach to assess the likelihood of coastal hazards and the severity of consequences, and made reference to the records of coastal damage caused by super typhoons in the past. It identified 26 coastal low-lying or windy residential areas with higher risks (including Heng Fa Chuen) for formulation of improvement works and management measures to safeguard public safety. The Government plans to take forward the various improvement works and implement the relevant management measures in an orderly manner over the next five years, and will conduct timely consultation with the stakeholders so as to meet the locals' needs and expectations. The Government will closely monitor the progress of the improvement works and management measures, and will keep track of climate change situation for carrying out a timely review of the measures for coping with coastal risks.

LCQ7: Cross-boundary Wealth Management Connect Scheme in Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area

Following is a question by the Hon Robert Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr Christopher Hui, in the Legislative Council today (April 27):

Question:

The Financial Secretary indicated in the Budget delivered on February 23 this year that the Government was exploring with the regulatory authorities of the Mainland on measures to enhance the Cross-boundary Wealth Management Connect Scheme in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (Wealth Management Connect). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that at present, only banking institutions may participate in Wealth Management Connect to provide cross-boundary wealth management services to investors, whether the Government has discussed with the regulatory authorities on the Mainland the inclusion of non-banking institutions (e.g. securities brokers, fund houses and licensed corporations) as institutions which may participate in Wealth Management Connect; if so, of the progress of the relevant work and implementation timetable; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it knows the current situation of the cross-boundary wealth management businesses of those banking institutions participating in Wealth Management Connect, including the amount of cross-boundary remittances per day, the major wealth management products for sale and the number of clients participating in Wealth Management Connect (set out by banks); whether it has assessed if Wealth Management Connect has achieved the effects desired by the Government since its launch; if the desired effects have not been achieved, of the unsatisfactory aspects; and

(3) given that at present, a Hong Kong investor participating in the Northbound Scheme needs to hold a Wealth Management Connect investment account with a Mainland bank, otherwise he or she must go to the Mainland to open such an account in person, but normal traveller clearance between Hong Kong and the Mainland has not yet resumed amid the epidemic, whether the Government will introduce an arrangement of "account opening by attestation", so that investors can open the accounts in Hong Kong; if so, of the timetable?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Lee is as follows:

Cross-boundary Wealth Management Connect (WMC) in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) was formally launched on September 10 last year, enabling residents in Hong Kong, Macao and nine cities in Guangdong Province to carry out cross-boundary investment in wealth management products distributed by banks in the GBA. The regulators of the three places promulgated the implementation details of WMC on the same day and banks commenced business on October 19.

WMC is the first Connect scheme specifically designed for individual investors and provides GBA residents with a formal, direct and convenient channel for cross-boundary investment in diversified wealth management products. It is a milestone in the financial development of the GBA and an important measure that deepens and widens mutual access between the financial markets of the Mainland and Hong Kong. On top of promoting the organic growth of our local wealth management market, WMC also brings enormous business opportunities to the entire financial industry value chain in Hong Kong, encompassing product development, product distribution, asset management and related professional and support services, promoting the sustainable development of the local financial industry.

Currently, 24 eligible Hong Kong banks have begun to offer WMC services together with their respective Mainland partner banks. As of February 28, 2022, over 24 000 individual investors participated in WMC and over 7 000 remittances (including Hong Kong and Macao) had been recorded. Cross-boundary fund remittances (including Hong Kong and Macao) totalled over RMB 670 million. According to the People's Bank of China, as of February 28, 2022, Mainland investment products held by Hong Kong and Macao investors under WMC stood at around RMB 204 million, including RMB 172 million in wealth management products and RMB 32 million in funds. Offshore investment products held by Mainland investors under WMC stood at around RMB 118 million, including RMB 16 million in funds and RMB 102 million in deposits. As of February 28, 2022, the aggregate quota usage under the Southbound Scheme and Northbound Scheme was over RMB 120 million and over RMB 230 million respectively (including Hong Kong and Macao and calculated on a net cross-boundary remittance basis).

WMC involves three different regulatory systems and requires close collaboration among the relevant regulators in the three places to find common ground and policy space within their respective regulatory regimes and existing practices.

According to current arrangements, Hong Kong residents can open WMC investment accounts in Hong Kong through a pilot bank that offers GBA account opening attestation service. Besides, Hong Kong residents who have already opened Renminbi (RMB) accounts with investment functions (i.e. Type I and Type II) in Mainland banks can designate those accounts as investment accounts under the Northbound Scheme without the need to travel to the Mainland in person for opening new accounts.

The financial regulators of Hong Kong are continuing the close liaison with the relevant Mainland authorities to explore gradual expansion of the account opening attestation service on the basis of the existing pilot scheme in order to facilitate the opening of RMB accounts in the Mainland by Hong Kong residents. In light of actual operational experience and market feedback, we are exploring other measures to enhance WMC in an incremental manner, such as allowing more participating financial institutions and improving sales arrangements, etc. Timely announcement on detailed arrangements will be made once the initiatives are ready for implementation.

LCQ12: Ex-gratia cash allowance for 2019 Coronavirus Disease patients

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Pui-leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (April 27):

Question:

The Government currently provides a one-off ex-gratia cash allowance of \$5,000 (cash allowance) for eligible locally confirmed 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) persons. One of the eligibility criteria is that the applicants face financial hardship whilst being hospitalised in public hospitals for treatment of the disease. There are views pointing out that due to the severe overloading of public hospital services earlier on, quite a number of confirmed patients could not be hospitalised for treatment and were thus ineligible to apply for the cash allowance. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of applications received, approved and rejected by the Government since the implementation of the aforesaid measure; if there were rejected applications, of the reasons for that; the average time taken for vetting and approving each application;

(2) as it is learnt that the government department responsible for vetting and approving the applications for cash allowance will only seek to verify the applicants' information with other government departments, the Hospital Authority and their employers as appropriate, whether the Government has conducted random checks on the applications in this regard to ensure that there is no abuse of the measure; if so, of the number of random checks conducted; and

(3) given that quite a number of confirmed patients could not be hospitalised in public hospitals for treatment earlier on, whether the Government will adjust the eligibility criteria for the cash allowance, e.g. an applicant is eligible for applying for the cash allowance on provision of proof of confirmed COVID-19 infection; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Regarding the question raised by the Hon Chan Pui-leung, my reply is as follows:

(1) As at April 4, 2022, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has received a

total of 2 150 applications for the one-off ex-gratia cash allowance for locally confirmed COVID-19 patients (the Scheme). Among them, 1 395 applications were approved, 26 applications were rejected and 109 applications were withdrawn by the applicants. Reasons for the applications being rejected include the applicant being an imported COVID-19 case, the applicant not being a confirmed COVID-19 case, the applicant being entitled to paid sick leave, etc. The SWD does not have the average vetting time for each application.

(2) The SWD vets all applications according to the published eligibility criteria, including examining the information provided by the applicants, contacting the employers of the applicants or relevant personnel to verify relevant information, and confirming with the Department of Health (DH) whether the applicants were eligible locally confirmed COVID-19 patients. If needed, the SWD will also require the applicant to further provide supporting documents for inspection and verification. In addition, the SWD will, in accordance with the risk-based principle, conduct random checks to prevent abuse.

(3) The Community Care Fund launched the Scheme on November 27, 2020 to disburse a one-off ex-gratia cash allowance of \$5,000 to eligible locally confirmed COVID-19 patients. The Scheme aims to remove the concern of potentially infected persons from coming forward to take tests that they would suffer from financial hardship whilst being hospitalised in public hospitals for COVID-19 treatment if they were tested positive. An applicant has to be a Hong Kong resident confirmed by the DH to have contracted COVID-19 locally, currently employed but not entitled to paid sick leave or is self-employed, and faces financial hardship whilst being hospitalised in public hospitals for COVID-19 treatment. The above eligibility criteria are currently valid.

When the Scheme was first launched, Hong Kong was in the fourth wave of the epidemic. Community testing centres (CTCs) and mobile specimen collection stations in various districts had gradually commenced testing service since mid-November 2020. To implement the strategy of "early identification, early isolation and early treatment" and to slow down the transmission of the virus, the Government has promulgated the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) on November 15, 2020. It provides a legal framework for the Government to require certain categories of persons to undergo COVID-19 testing, and to allow specified medical practitioners to require symptomatic patients to undergo testing. The transmissibility and the number of infected persons of the fourth wave of the epidemic were lower than those of the current fifth wave. Local public hospitals were able to admit all confirmed patients for treatment at that time with their average length of hospitalisation being 14 days. Since this would have a greater financial impact to those who were employed but not entitled to paid sick leave and those who were self-employed, some members of the public might be hesitant to undergo testing. The Scheme was a supporting measure introduced under the aforesaid background.

Since the launch of the Scheme, concerns of the public in undergoing testing have greatly reduced. Compared to some 590 000 tests performed

monthly at that time, more than 2.8 million tests were performed in CTCs and mobile specimen collection stations in March 2022. In addition, since March 7, 2022, more than 440 000 positive results from self-administered rapid antigen test (RAT) were reported to the DH by members of the public. During the fifth wave of the epidemic, patients with relatively mild symptoms may be admitted to community isolation facilities or stay at home for isolation. Infected persons who have received at least two doses of COVID-19 vaccines may be discharged from isolation if they obtained negative RAT results consecutively on the sixth and seventh day of isolation. At present, about 80 per cent of the public have had received at least two doses of COVID-19 vaccines. Therefore, the number of days absent from work due to infection has significantly reduced, thus having lesser financial impact on the infected.

In view of the ever-changing situation of the epidemic, the Government has introduced various measures to assist sectors and people affected by the epidemic. For example, the Temporary Unemployment Relief Scheme was launched under the sixth round of the Anti-epidemic Fund, granting a one-off subsidy of \$10,000 to eligible persons who lost their jobs due to the fifth wave of the epidemic to reduce their financial stress before they find another job. Full-time or part-time employees, as well as self-employed persons may apply. The Government has also introduced a bill to amend the Employment Ordinance (EO) stipulating that employees' absence from work for the purpose of complying with requirements restricting their movement imposed under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance, including isolation due to infection or being made subject to "restriction-testing declarations", will be deemed as sickness days under the EO. Sickness allowance is to be provided to affected employees, subject to the fulfilment of the relevant criteria under the EO, to reduce the financial impact on them.

When considering whether the eligibility criteria of the Scheme should be relaxed, the Government has to take into consideration the changes of the epidemic situation, other supporting measures, the pressure on public finance brought by relaxation of the eligibility criteria and other relevant factors. Currently, the Government has no plan to adjust the eligibility criteria of the Scheme.

Report No. 77 of the Director of Audit

Report No. 77 of the Director of Audit on the results of value for money audits (VFM Audit Report No. 77) was tabled in the Legislative Council (LegCo) this morning (April 27).

Value for money audit is an examination into the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which any bureau of the Government Secretariat, department, agency or other public body has discharged its functions. VFM Audit Report No. 77 covers a variety of subjects on the administration of

government programmes and provision of public services.

The submission of VFM Audit Report No. 77 to the President of LegCo was originally due in October 2021. In light of the prorogation of the sixth LegCo on October 30, 2021, the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region had given approval for deferring the submission of the Report to no later than April 7, 2022, i.e. the deadline for submission of Report No. 78 of the Director of Audit on the results of value for money audits (VFM Audit Report No. 78). In the event, VFM Audit Report No. 77 was submitted to the President of LegCo on April 6, 2022.

VFM Audit Report No. 77 comprises the following eight chapters:

Chapter	Subject
1	Highways Department: Maintenance of public footpaths
2	Kai Tak District Cooling System
3	Leisure and Cultural Services Department: Provision and management of sports grounds
4	Licensing and examination services for vehicles
5	Management of flushing water supply
6	Safeguarding employees' rights and benefits under labour laws
7	The Mental Health Association of Hong Kong
8	Youth College

â€‹The Report is available on the Audit Commission's website at www.aud.gov.hk.

Regarding VFM Audit Report No. 78, in light of the need for the Government as a whole to concentrate all efforts to fight the COVID-19 epidemic, the Audit Commission, with the agreement of the President of LegCo, the Public Accounts Committee and the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, has deferred the submission of the Report to no later than October 31, 2022 (i.e. the deadline for submission of Report No. 79 of the Director of Audit on the results of value for money audits). In accordance with the value for money audit guidelines tabled in the Provisional LegCo on February 11, 1998, approval of the Chief Executive has been obtained for the deferral.