

LCQ12: General out-patient services provided by the Hospital Authority

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Priscilla Leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (January 27):

Question:

Currently, three District Council Districts, namely Sham Shui Po, Yau Tsim Mong and Kowloon City, have a total population of about 1.16 million. However, among the general out-patient (GOP) clinics provided by the Hospital Authority (HA) in these districts, only one (i.e. the Yau Ma Tei Jockey Club General Out-patient Clinic (Yau Ma Tei Clinic)) provides GOP services in the evening and on Sundays and public holidays (non-office hours). As such, those residents of these districts who need to seek consultation during non-office hours but are unable to secure an appointment under the quotas of Yau Ma Tei Clinic have to seek consultation at GOP clinics in other districts, accident and emergency departments of public hospitals or private clinics. The situation has shown no improvement since I raised a relevant question in 2016. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows the respective annual attendances of Yau Ma Tei Clinic from 2016 to 2020 (i) during the daytime from Mondays to Saturdays and (ii) during non-office hours; whether the HA has assessed if the consultation services currently provided by the Clinic during non-office hours can meet the demand;

(2) whether it will revise the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines to stipulate in detail that the following planning standard applies to all hours of the day: one general clinic/health centre to be provided for every 100 000 persons;

(3) whether it knows if the HA will consider afresh making arrangements to enable the GOP clinics in Sham Shui Po and Kowloon City districts to provide GOP services during non-office hours; and

(4) of the progress made by the authorities in the development of the following three primary care facilities: the construction of a community health centre (CHC) complex at the original site of the Shek Kip Mei Health Centre, the provision of a GOP clinic in the Treasury Building in Cheung Sha Wan, and the provision of a CHC at the ex-Mongkok Market site; as the Government indicated in February 2016 that the HA would consider at a later stage whether to provide non-office hours GOP services in the three facilities upon commissioning, of the outcome of the HA's consideration?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Hospital Authority (HA), the Government provides a consolidated reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Dr the Hon Priscilla Leung as follows:

The service of the HA's General Out-patient Clinics (GOPCs) is primarily used by the elders, low-income individuals and patients with chronic diseases. Patients under the care of GOPCs comprise two major categories: chronic disease patients with stable medical conditions, and episodic disease patients with relatively mild symptoms. As GOPCs are not intended for the provision of emergency services, patients with severe and acute symptoms should attend the accident and emergency departments where necessary manpower, equipment and ancillary facilities are in place to provide comprehensive and appropriate treatment and support.

Currently, there are three GOPCs in Yau Tsim Mong District under the HA, namely Kwong Wah Hospital General Out-patient Department, Li Po Chun GOPC and Yau Ma Tei Jockey Club GOPC. Evening clinic services are provided in all three clinics, whereas Sunday and public holiday clinic services are provided in Yau Ma Tei Jockey Club GOPC. As for Sham Shui Po District, there are five GOPCs, namely Caritas Medical Centre Family Medicine Clinic, Cheung Sha Wan Jockey Club GOPC, Nam Shan GOPC, Shek Kip Mei GOPC, and West Kowloon GOPC, among which evening clinic services are provided in Cheung Sha Wan Jockey Club GOPC. In Kowloon City District, there are four GOPCs, namely Central Kowloon Health Centre, Hung Hom Clinic, Shun Tak Fraternal Association Leung Kau Kui Clinic and Lee Kee Memorial Dispensary. Evening clinic services are provided in Central Kowloon Health Centre.

In regard to the consultation quotas, the numbers may vary among clinics depending on the geographical location and the scale of the clinic. While the service volume of the various clinics is relatively stable, the daily service volume of individual clinics may be slightly adjusted with regard to manpower and operational reasons. Since 2016, the HA had been uploading the average numbers of consultation quotas of individual GOPCs for the preceding four weeks by district on its GOPC webpage (www.ha.org.hk/gopc), so that members of the public can obtain an overview of the number of consultation quotas and the general service capacity of individual clinics. According to records, the daily average numbers of consultation quotas of the three GOPCs in Yau Tim Mong District, including Kwong Wah Hospital General Out-patient Department, Li Po Chun GOPC and Yau Ma Tei Jockey Club GOPC, for the preceding four weeks (i.e. December 27, 2020 to January 23, 2021) are as follows. Consultation quotas of the clinics have been fully utilised all along.

	Monday to Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Kwong Wah Hospital General Out-patient Department	316.5	155.0	N/A

Li Po Chun GOPC	272.5	105.3	N/A
Yau Ma Tei Jockey Club GOPC	603.2	250.8	182.0

Generally speaking, the smooth operation of a clinic relies on the teamwork of a team, which comprises doctors, nurses, pharmacists, dispensers, patient services assistants, clerical staff, supporting staff and may as well involve allied health professionals while the number of staff may be adjusted according to the service volume. To ensure the effective use of the resources of GOPCs, it is considered that clinics in the same district would be complimentary to each other for better synergy effects. It is therefore considered more cost-effective to focus on increasing the quotas for consultation in evenings/on Sundays and public holidays in the clinics which are currently providing relevant services.

Recognising the enormous demand for public primary healthcare services in the community, the HA endeavors to enhance the services and has reserved sites in different districts for the long term development of primary healthcare.

For Sham Shui Po District, taking the opportunity of the Shek Kip Mei Estate Phase 6 Redevelopment project, the HA plans to redevelop the Shek Kip Mei Health Centre and re-provision the dilapidated Shek Kip Mei GOPC in-situ by developing a new Community Health Centre (CHC) building. The CHC will consolidate the public primary healthcare services and facilities in the district in order to provide one-stop and diversified primary healthcare service to the public. As the CHC project is still at a preliminary planning stage, the HA will take into account various factors to plan the services of the CHC before its service commissioning. In addition, the HA will provide a GOPC in the Treasury Building under construction at the junction of Tung Chau Street and Tonkin Street West in Cheung Sha Wan. The new GOPC would further enhance the synergy effect brought by the service co-ordination of various GOPCs in Sham Shui Po District, thereby enhancing the service standard of the primary healthcare facilities there. The construction works of the Treasury Building is expected to complete in the second quarter of 2022. The HA will prepare for the service commissioning of the GOPC in accordance with the project timeline of other relevant government departments.

As for Yau Tsim Mong District, since the Development Bureau (DEVB) has decided not to include the ex-Mong Kok Market site in the Land Sale Programme at the moment, while the Food and Health Bureau (FHB) is keen to set up District Health Centre (DHCs) in all districts early to enhance district-based primary healthcare services, upon studies by the FHB, the DEVB and the Urban Renewal Authority (URA), the URA would transform the interior of the ex-Mong Kok Market building through renovation works for the provision of Yau Tsim Mong DHC. The FHB consulted Yau Tsim Mong District Council on the relevant plan on September 3, 2020. Therefore, the plan to develop a CHC in the ex-Mong Kok Market Site has been replaced. The HA would identify another suitable site for the provision of the CHC.

In planning for the provision of public primary healthcare services, the Government takes into account a number of factors, including primary healthcare service delivery model, demographic changes, distribution of the target groups, the provision of primary healthcare services in the district, and the demand for public primary healthcare services, etc. The Government will assess whether there is any need to review the relevant planning standard at appropriate times in view of the society development and the actual needs among districts. The HA will continue to pay close attention to the demand for public primary healthcare services within the district and tie in with the overall policy development of the Government, and explore various feasible options to ensure that primary health care services could be appropriately provided to our major service users under limited resources.

Exchange Fund Position at end-December 2020

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

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) today (January 27) published the unaudited financial position of the Exchange Fund at end-December 2020.

The Exchange Fund recorded an investment income of HK\$197.8 billion in 2020. The main components were:

- gains on bonds of HK\$92.5 billion;
- gains on Hong Kong equities of HK\$4.0 billion;
- gains on other equities of HK\$69.0 billion;
- positive currency translation effect of HK\$9.6 billion on non-Hong Kong dollar assets (Note 1); and
- gains on other investments of HK\$22.7 billion (Note 2).

Fees on placements by the Fiscal Reserves and placements by Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government funds and statutory bodies were HK\$32.6 billion (Note 3) and HK\$11.5 billion respectively in 2020, with the rate of fee payment at 3.7 per cent for 2020. After deducting all expenses and fees, the Accumulated Surplus of the Exchange Fund recorded an increase of HK\$103.7 billion (Annexes 1 & 2).

The Abridged Balance Sheet shows that the total assets of the Exchange Fund increased by HK\$294.1 billion, from HK\$4,206.7 billion at the end of 2019 to HK\$4,500.8 billion at the end of 2020. The increase was mainly attributable to the investment income in 2020 and an increase in the balance of the banking system, which were partly offset by the reduction in Fiscal Reserves placements.

The Exchange Fund recorded an investment return of 4.4 per cent in 2020 (Note 4). Specifically, the Investment Portfolio achieved a rate of return of 7.8 per cent, while the Backing Portfolio gained 1.6 per cent. The Long-Term Growth Portfolio (LTGP) recorded an annualised internal rate of return of 12.5 per cent since its inception in 2009 up to the end of September 2020.

Commenting on the performance of the Exchange Fund in 2020, Mr Eddie Yue, Chief Executive of the HKMA, said, "To many investors, 2020 was a year full of unexpected twists and turns. The novel coronavirus has posed significant challenges to the world economy. However, driven by the ultra-loose monetary policies implemented by major central banks and a series of relief measures launched by various governments, asset markets rebounded quickly from sharp corrections, with a number of equity markets reaching record highs during the year. For the year as a whole, the Exchange Fund achieved a decent return on its equity and bond investments."

Mr Yue said, "The main focus for 2021 will be the timing and pace of recovery of different economies. Global recovery is in sight but the evolving pandemic will still have a bearing on the global economic outlook. In addition, geopolitical risks remain a cause for concern. The foreign policy direction of the new US administration, developments of the China-US relations, as well as implementation of the Brexit agreement will all have impact on the financial markets.

It is worth noting that the global equity markets have recorded substantial gains for two consecutive years, owing to the persisting low interest rate environment. However, it is still uncertain whether the lofty valuations can be sustained. An ultra-low interest rate environment will also bring about significant challenges to our substantial bond holding. On the one hand, low interest rates will have significant negative impact on interest income from bonds. Furthermore, the limited room for further decrease in bond yields (i.e. rise in bond prices) will also significantly weaken the effectiveness of risk diversification in the portfolio mix of bonds and equities during market turbulence. The situation will worsen further should the prolonged low interest rate environment and the massive fiscal stimulus launched by various governments lead to rising inflationary pressure in the future, resulting in surging bond yields and major corrections in the global asset markets, thereby exerting downward pressure on the valuations of the Exchange Fund's assets.

Despite this ever-changing and complex global investment environment, the HKMA will continue to manage the Exchange Fund prudently and remain flexible. We will also implement defensive measures as appropriate and maintain a high degree of liquidity to deal with possible financial disruptions. The Exchange Fund will continue to serve its purpose of maintaining monetary and financial stability in Hong Kong in an effective manner."

Note 1: This is primarily the effect of translating foreign currency assets into Hong Kong dollar after deducting the portion for currency hedging.

Note 2: This is the valuation change of investments held by investment holding subsidiaries of the Exchange Fund. This figure represents valuation

changes up to the end of September 2020. Valuations of these investments from October to December are not yet available.

Note 3: This does not include the 2020 fee payment to the Future Fund because such amount will only be disclosed when the composite rate for 2020 is available.

Note 4: This return excludes the performance of the Strategic Portfolio and only includes the performance of LTGP up to the end of September 2020. The audited full year return will be disclosed in the 2020 annual report to be released later this year.

[PlanD to resume more basic public services](#)

The Planning Department (PlanD) announced today (January 27) that, in addition to the continued provision of emergency services and essential public services, it will resume the provision of some basic public services starting from tomorrow (January 28) until further notice.

The Planning Enquiry Counters (PECs) of North Point Government Offices (NPGO) (17/F) and Sha Tin Government Offices (14/F) will continue to make available documents required under the Town Planning Ordinance for public inspection, while other counter services will continue to be suspended.

In view of the need to reduce flows of people and social contact, the PECs will restrict the number of visitors at any one time. Members of the public are encouraged to make enquiries through the telephone hotline (2231 5000) or email (enquire@pland.gov.hk), and can visit the PlanD's website (www.pland.gov.hk) for general planning information.

The District Planning Offices of the PlanD will resume essential fieldwork. No site notices will be posted for planning applications published during this period. Notices of planning applications will continue to be published in the prescribed newspapers and posted on the Town Planning Board (TPB)'s website (www.info.gov.hk/tpb). Members of the public are invited to pay attention to such notices in the newspapers and on the TPB website.

Meanwhile, the receipt and dispatch counter of the department on the 18th floor of NPGO will continue to maintain basic services during office hours (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday).

The City Gallery will continue to be temporarily closed until further notice. To enable the public to continue to enjoy the services during the closure period, the City Gallery is hosting activities through an online platform. For details, please call the City Gallery at 3102 1242 during office hours or visit the City Gallery's website (www.citygallery.gov.hk).

For enquiries, please call the hotline 2231 5000 during office hours or visit the PlanD's website.

Site trial on use of electric mobility devices to be held at Tseung Kwan O cycle track from January 29 to 31

The Transport Department (TD) today (January 27) said that a site trial on the use of two main types of electric mobility devices, including motorised personal mobility devices (mPMDs) and power assist pedal cycles (PAPCs), will be held from 10am to 7pm from January 29 to 31 on a cycle track section about 1.4 kilometres long at Tong Chun Street and next to the Tseung Kwan O Waterfront Park. The site trial aims to gain operating experience in regulating the use of mPMDs and PAPCs on cycle tracks and test the effectiveness of certain safety requirements.

Registered trial participants with a permit issued by the TD will join the site trial, which is a one-off arrangement specifically for the site trial. Users of mPMDs/PAPCs without pre-registration are not allowed to join the site trial. Use of mPMDs/PAPCs without a permit or use of mPMDs/PAPCs outside the designated location and time period specified in the permit may commit an offence under the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374), its subsidiary legislation and other relevant legislations.

Members of the public are advised to be alert to the arrangement of the site trial and be cautious when cycling in the designated cycle track section or crossing the cycle track. Ambassadors will be on site to provide guidance and necessary assistance while social distancing measures will be in place to safeguard public health against the epidemic.

For details, please visit the TD's website (www.td.gov.hk/en/road_safety/electric_mobility_devices/index.html).

LCQ4: Variants of the coronavirus

Following is a question by the Hon Jimmy Ng and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (January 27):

Question:

The World Health Organization has reported that variants of the coronavirus causing the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) have been found in Denmark, the United Kingdom, South Africa and Japan one after another, with some of such variants having higher transmissibility. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that some virus variants have higher transmissibility, whether the Government will implement more stringent measures to prevent the importation of cases;

(2) whether it has reviewed if the various COVID-19 vaccines that it has procured or planned to procure are effective in preventing the virus variants from causing diseases, and reviewed the performance of the various tests in detecting the virus variants; and

(3) given the unsatisfactory vaccination rates of most of the countries which have commenced COVID-19 vaccination, whether the Government has put in place concrete measures for spurring the majority of members of the public to receive vaccination voluntarily; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Jimmy Ng is as follows:

(1) As the global epidemic situation is still raging, with the more transmissible new virus variants spreading in some overseas places, the Government must stay vigilant and has imposed stringent prevention and control measures to avert the importation of cases.

We cannot drop our guard considering the higher transmissibility of the new virus variants. Noting the prevalence of the new virus variants in certain places, the Government had, in late December last year and mid-January this year, made the relevant specifications under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H) to restrict persons who have stayed in Brazil, Ireland, South Africa and the United Kingdom for more than two hours on the day of boarding or during the 21 days before that day from boarding flights for Hong Kong.

Meanwhile, according to the guidelines of the World Health Organization (WHO), the incubation period of the virus can be as long as 14 days. Although there was no current evidence indicating that the incubation period of the new virus variant can be longer, with reference to advice from experts that the incubation period of virus carried by very few infected persons can be

longer than 14 days, coupled with the rapid and drastic change of the global pandemic situation, the Government had at the end of last year amended the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation (Cap. 599C), the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E) and Cap. 599H as a precautionary measure. This allows the Government to, having regard to the extent and pattern of the spread of diseases in a certain place and the public health risk posed to Hong Kong by the relevant persons arriving at Hong Kong, provide for the flexibility, based on anti-epidemic needs, in lengthening the compulsory quarantine period for persons arriving at Hong Kong from a certain place, and the period for a certain foreign place in which persons who arrive at Hong Kong have stayed before the arrival for determining the quarantine and boarding requirements. We have specified under the relevant amended regulations published in the Gazette to require that from December 25, 2020, all persons arriving at Hong Kong who have stayed in places outside China on the day of arrival at Hong Kong or during the 21 days before that day to undergo compulsory quarantine for 21 days in designated quarantine hotels, so as to ensure that no case will slip through the net even under very exceptional cases where the incubation period of the virus was longer than 14 days.

The Government will continue to closely monitor the situation, including the development of the epidemic situation both globally and locally and the changes in the volume of cross-boundary passenger traffic, and will implement even more decisive measures as and when necessary to prevent the importation of the virus into the Hong Kong community.

(2) and (3) In terms of testing, the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch under the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health is currently using the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) nucleic acid test to conduct and process COVID-19 testing. The reagent used is not affected by the genetic transformation of the virus' S protein.

In terms of vaccines, the vaccines advance purchased by the Government are respectively the inactivated virus vaccine by Sinovac Biotech (Hong Kong) Limited, the nucleic acid vaccine by Fosun Pharma/German drug developer BioNTech, and the viral vector vaccine by AstraZeneca/University of Oxford. Our goal is to procure at least one vaccine from each vaccine technology platform. This means we will purchase four different vaccines, with the aggregate number of doses sufficient to serve at least two times the population of Hong Kong. This is to diversify risks and ensure sufficient supplies of safe and efficacious vaccines for the whole of Hong Kong.

To ensure that the vaccines fulfil the requirements of safety, efficacy and quality, the clinical data, overseas authorisation obtained, and other information relevant to the safety, efficacy and quality of COVID-19 vaccines used in Hong Kong must be reviewed by the Advisory Panel on COVID-19 Vaccines established under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Use of Vaccines) Regulation (Cap. 599K) (the Regulation). Before authorising a vaccine, the Secretary for Food and Health will take into account the expert advice of the Advisory Panel. The Government will ensure that vaccines satisfy the

requirements of safety, efficacy and quality, and obtain emergency use approval in accordance with the relevant requirements as well as stringent approval procedures under the Regulation, before arranging for members of the public to receive the vaccines. With user statistics and immunisation responses of the vaccine clinical trials gradually becoming available, we can obtain more information on the safety, efficacy and quality of the various types of COVID-19 vaccines. The Government will closely monitor the development of COVID-19 vaccines and the epidemic situation in Hong Kong and around the world. At the same time, we will make reference to relevant guidelines promulgated by the WHO and continuously monitor the safety and efficacy of the vaccines.

As the administration of vaccines will be a territory-wide programme, we will do well in the work on information dissemination, promotion and education. When implementing the vaccination programme, we will adopt a science-based approach. We will disseminate the benefits and correct information on vaccination, the views of experts and details of the vaccination programme, etc. to members of the public through various channels. We will also step up monitoring of false information on vaccines within the community and make timely clarifications as necessary. We will later set up a thematic website for the vaccination programme, so that members of the public can have access to the most updated information and messages from an official channel.

Thank you, President.