

LEGCO PANEL ON WELFARE SERVICES

Progress Report on the Trust Fund for Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome

Purpose

This paper informs Members of the up-to-date position of the Trust Fund for Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), following its establishment on 8 November 2003.

Background

2. At the meeting on 7 November 2003, the Finance Committee approved a one-off commitment of \$150 million to establish a Trust Fund for SARS (ref : FCR(2003-04)44) to provide -

- (a) special ex-gratia relief payments to families with deceased SARS patients;
- (b) assistance, including special ex-gratia financial assistance, for recovered SARS patients suffering from longer term effects, attributable to SARS (including the effects of medication received for SARS, if any), which may result in some degree of bodily dysfunction, subject to medical proof and financial need (hereinafter called recovered SARS patients); and
- (c) assistance, including special ex-gratia financial assistance, for patients who were clinically diagnosed as having SARS on admission, treated with steroids as medication for SARS, but turned out subsequently not to have SARS, suffering from longer term effects, attributable to the effects of steroids received (if any), which may result in some degree of physical dysfunction, subject to medical proof and financial need, in case this happens (hereinafter called “suspected” SARS patients treated with steroids).

The purview of the proposed Trust Fund would be confined to families of deceased

SARS patients and those recovered SARS patients who contracted SARS during the outbreak in Hong Kong from March to June 2003, and those “suspected” SARS patients with presumptive clinical diagnosis of SARS and subsequently found not to have SARS, treated with steroids as medication for SARS, during the outbreak in Hong Kong in the same period¹.

Latest Position

Committee and Review Committee

3. The Committee on Trust Fund for SARS was established on 8 November 2003 to advise on the detailed eligibility criteria and assessment of individual applications. The composition and terms of reference are at Annex A. A Review Committee, chaired by a senior counsel, was also set up on the same day to consider applications for review of the recommendations of the Committee on Trust Fund for SARS. The composition and terms of reference are at Annex B.

4. The Director of Social Welfare is the Trustee for the Trust Fund for SARS.

Applications

5. The Committee has met three times since its establishment on 8 November 2003 to consider the applications received. The Committee examines each application in detail having regard to the parameters set out in the Finance Committee Agenda Item (FCai). The FCai also sets out areas where discretion is given to the Committee to consider applications, and the Committee has developed detailed eligibility criteria in respect of such applications. Where there are doubts, legal advice is also sought. The Committee ensures that the assessment of each case is fair and consistent.

6. Up to end November 2003, we have received a total of 174 applications involving 128 deceased cases and the Hospital Authority (HA) has received a total of 121 pre-checked applications from recovered SARS patients. A total of 125 applications have been approved with a total amount of \$46 million. Of which, \$26.1 million has been or is being disbursed. Other applications are under processing.

7. A breakdown of the applications received and approved is at Annex C.

Medical Assessment

8. To assess the medical eligibility of applicants under the Trust Fund, HA is

¹ All the patients in question should be Hong Kong residents.

assessing the medical status of these applicants in order to ascertain whether they suffer from the relevant dysfunction as a result of the SARS infection or the effects of the related medication (if any). This ties in with the strengthened comprehensive follow-up programme launched by HA since mid-October 2003, whereby all the recovered SARS patients and “suspected” SARS patients treated with steroids are being invited to come back in batches for medical screenings. The first screenings are done six to nine months, following discharge from hospitals, when the medical conditions of the applicants should have stabilized. Apart from this, applicants not feeling well should have approached HA’s clinics and hospitals for medical assessment in the first instance. Therefore, the additional measure of medical assessment by HA should have provided another safeguard to facilitate early treatment.

9. HA will make an overall medical assessment on the basis of the applicants’ available assessment records. A medical consultant designated for all the vetting will make final review of the assessment results and endorse the relevant functional/psychological status as appropriate. This will ensure consistency in the vetting process. Further professional opinion will be sought if necessary.

Financial Assessment

10. The financial needs of and the level of assistance for those applying for the monthly financial assistance are being assessed by the Social Welfare Department on individual merits on a case-by-case basis, having regard to the loss or reduction in income or the increase in expenditure, arising from SARS (including the effects of medication, if any).

Way Forward

11. We would continue to submit the applications to the Committee on Trust Fund for SARS for consideration as and when the preparatory work is ready.

12. Members of the Legislative Council will be kept informed as and when appropriate.

Committee on Trust Fund for SARS

Membership

Chairperson

Dr David Fang

Non-Official Members

Ms Deborah Wan Lai Yau

Ms Iris Chan Sui Ching

Mr Benedict Wong Chung Mat

Ms Scarlett Pong Oi Lan

Ex-officio Member

Director of Social Welfare's representative

Secretary

Social Work Officer (Rehabilitation and Medical Social Services), Social Welfare Department

Note: Representatives from the Hospital Authority and other Government bureaux/departments may attend on a need basis.

Terms of Reference

In line with the parameters set out in the Finance Committee Agenda Item FCR(2003-04)44, to -

- (a) advise on the eligibility criteria for applications for ex-gratia relief payments to families with deceased SARS patients and the eligibility criteria for applications for assistance, including ex-gratia financial assistance, for recovered SARS patients and "suspected" SARS patients treated with steroids;

- (b) consider applications for ex-gratia relief payments to families with deceased SARS patients and the applications for assistance, including ex-gratia financial assistance, for recovered SARS patients and “suspected” SARS patients treated with steroids and make recommendations to the Trustee; and
- (c) advise the Trustee on any other matters relating to the administration of the Fund.

Review Committee on Trust Fund for SARS

Membership

Chairman

Mr Benjamin Yu SC

Members

Ms Christine Fang

Professor Richard Yu

Secretary

Principal Assistant Secretary (Welfare)

Terms of Reference

To consider applications for review of the decision of the Committee on Trust Fund for SARS in relation to the applications for ex-gratia relief payments to families with deceased SARS patients and the applications for assistance, including ex-gratia financial assistance, for recovered SARS patients and “suspected” SARS patients treated with steroids and make recommendations to the Trustee.

**Breakdown of the Applications Received and Approved
under the Trust Fund for SARS**

Category	Amount (\$)	Number of Applications Received	Number of Applications Approved	Amount approved (\$)
<i>Deceased SARS patients – special ex-gratia relief payment</i>				
Surviving dependent children	\$500,000 for each child aged below 18 at the time of the parent's death	35	29 (involving 53 children)	26.5 million
	\$300,000 for each child aged between 18 and below 21 in full time studies at the time of the parent's death	4	3 (involving 3 children)	0.9 million
Surviving spouses	\$200,000 regardless of age	112	91	18.2 million
Surviving dependent parents	\$300,000 for each dependent parent	17	1	0.3 million
Other families not eligible for any of the above but meeting certain criteria	\$100,000 for each family	6	1	0.1 million
	<i>Sub-Total</i>	<i>174</i>	<i>125</i>	<i>46 million</i>

Category	Amount (\$)	Number of Applications Received	Number of Applications Approved	Amount approved (\$)
<i>Eligible recovered or “suspected” SARS patients treated with steroids – special ex-gratia financial assistance</i>				
For eligible recovered SARS patients	On a need basis, with cumulative financial assistance receivable by a patient capped at \$500,000 per patient	121	-	-
For eligible “suspected” SARS patients treated with steroids	On a need basis, with cumulative financial assistance receivable by a patient capped at \$500,000 per patient	0	-	-
	<i>Sub-Total</i>	<i>121</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>
	Total	295	125	46 million