

Our Ref.: () in FH/H/46/1 Pt. 6
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4 December 2007

Miss Mary SO
Clerk to Panel on Health Services
Legislative Council
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road
Central
Hong Kong

Dear Miss So,

**Meeting of Legislative Council Panel on Health Services on 17 July 2007
Medical services in Tung Chung**

I refer to our information paper dated 9 July 2007 and the above meeting at which we briefed Members on the medical services in Tung Chung, including the existing services and the latest progress of the preparatory work for the planned North Lantau Hospital (“NLH”). Planning for the NLH is actively underway. According to the current plan, the NLH will be commissioned in phases starting from 2011/12. Subject to the relevant legal and administrative procedures, the Government and the Hospital Authority (“HA”) will expedite the planning and construction process of the NLH. Regarding other proposals raised in the motion passed by Members at the above meeting, we have examined the proposals in detail in conjunction with HA and our reply is set out below.

Providing round-the-clock out-patient service

At present, public general out-patient clinics (GOPCs) do not provide 24-hour out-patient services. GOPCs are not meant to provide emergency services and are not substitutes for accident and emergency services. Patients in genuine urgent medical needs should seek treatment from the accident and emergency departments of hospitals. To ensure effective use of GOPC resources, the Administration has no plan at this stage to provide 24-hour service at the GOPC in Tung Chung.

Nevertheless, we understand that the distinctive factors of Tung Chung may lead to greater demand by residents for evening out-patient service. HA has thus re-introduced on a trial basis the “special evening out-patient service” with effect from 30 July 2007 to serve local patients who cannot seek medical consultations during daytime. The purpose of the trial is to make an in-depth assessment of the utilisation of evening out-patient services by local residents in the district and the cost-effectiveness of the public sector providing evening out-patient services. The trial run will be conducted for six months, and HA will conduct a review after the trial period based on the utilisation of the service, with a view to assessing the need of residents for the service and the cost-effectiveness of providing such services.

Increasing the consultation slots for out-patient service and improving the booking service by allocating some consultation slots to patients who queue in person for the convenience of the elderly

At present, general out-patient services in Hong Kong are primarily provided by the private sector. Public GOPC services are mainly targeted at low-income families, the chronically ill and the vulnerable groups (including the poor and frail elderly populations). On the basis of demographic profile, the level of public GOPC services currently provided for Tung Chung residents is already higher than the overall average of the whole territory. The Administration has no plan at this stage to increase the number of consultation slots at the Tung Chung GOPC. The implementation of the “special evening out-patient service” trial run will increase the service volume of the Tung Chung Health Centre.

Regarding booking of GOPC services, GOPCs have implemented the telephone booking service with the primary objective of improving the crowded queuing conditions in GOPCs and optimising the use of GOPC resources. HA has over time introduced a number of improvement measures, including the reservation of appointment quotas for the elderly at GOPCs (including the Tung Chung Health Centre). Under the arrangements, a certain number of quotas are reserved for the elderly based on previous attendance, to ensure that the implementation of the telephone booking service will not reduce their access to public GOPC services. We will continue to explore with HA possible arrangements to facilitate access to GOPC

services by the elderly who may have specific difficulties in using the telephone booking service.

Opening up the dental service for the public, subject to the principle of according priority to civil servants

On dental services, the Government's basic policy is to raise the awareness of the public in oral health through publicity and education, thereby encouraging the development of proper oral health habits. Based on this policy, it mainly provides emergency dental treatment to the general public and dental services to in-patients and those with special oral health care needs.

The Government Dental Clinic in the Tung Chung Health Centre serves civil servants who are entitled to medical benefits provided by the Government. The average utilisation rate of the clinic in the past two years has exceeded 97%. The Administration has no plan to open the clinic to the public. At present, there are already 11 government dental clinics under the Department of Health providing dental services to people who require emergency treatment. General dental services are usually provided by private dental practitioners. Individual voluntary organisations including a number of member institutes of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service have also set up dental clinics in different districts, e.g. the Tung Chung Clinic of the Project Concern in Yat Tung Estate, providing dental services to the public at modest price.

Providing seven-days-a-week out-patient services

The Tung Chung Health Centre now provides public GOPC services five days and a half each week, including evening clinic services. Its consultation hours are similar to those of other GOPCs under HA which operate extended hours (i.e. from 9 am to 5 pm and 6 pm to 10 pm on Mondays to Fridays, and from 9 am to 1 pm on Saturdays). In the Tung Chung area, there are also a number of clinics run by private medical practitioners providing out-patient services seven days a week until very late hours. The general consultation and medication fees charged by these clinics are about HK\$100 to HK\$150, which should be affordable to most of the public apart from the target groups of public GOPCs. Due to resource considerations, the Administration does not have plan at this stage to provide seven-day services at the Tung Chung GOPC. Together with HA, we will closely monitor the general out-patient services in the district with a view to examining the scope for further improvement to the services and alternative modes of service delivery.

Providing transitional accident and emergency service expeditiously

Accident and emergency services will continue to be provided to Tung Chung residents mainly by Princess Margaret Hospital in the interim before the NLH commence operations. HA will closely monitor the medical and health services

available for Tung Chung residents and take appropriate enhancement measures where necessary.

Yours sincerely,

(Thomas CHAN)
for Secretary for Food and Health

c.c. Chief Executive, Hospital Authority

(Attn : Dr CHAN Wing-tat
Dr YIU Yuk-kwan)