

政府總部
公務員事務局
香港添馬添美道2號
政府總部西翼



CIVIL SERVICE BUREAU
GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT
WEST WING
CENTRAL GOVERNMENT OFFICES
2 TIM MEI AVENUE, TAMAR
HONG KONG

本函檔號 Our Ref.: (2) in L/M to PC 700/000/1 Pt. 30

來函檔號 Your Ref.:

電話號碼 Tel. No.: 2810 3100

傳真號碼 Fax No.: 2501 0749

電郵地址 E-mail Address: csbts@csb.gov.hk

網址 Homepage Address: <http://www.csb.gov.hk>

17 March 2014

Clerk to Panel on Public Service
(Attn.: Ms Anita SIT)
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central
Hong Kong

Dear Ms SIT,

Panel on Public Service
Motion passed at the meeting on 17 February 2014

I refer to the motion moved by Hon KWOK Wai-keung as amended by Hon TANG Ka-piu, and passed by the Panel on Public Service on 17 February 2014. The Administration's written response is set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

The Government's policy on the provision of medical and dental benefits to civil service eligible persons

The Government, as an employer, is committed to honouring its contractual obligation of providing medical and dental benefits to civil service eligible persons as part of their terms and conditions of service. The scope of such benefits is set out in the relevant Civil Service Regulations (CSRs), Civil Service Bureau Circulars and Circular Memoranda.

Under the existing provisions in the CSRs, save for the charges applicable to hospital maintenance, dentures and dental appliances as provided for in the CSRs, civil service eligible persons are entitled to free medical treatment and services, X-ray examinations and medicines, but only when such benefits are provided by the Government or Hospital Authority (HA) medical

services. They may also apply to the Department of Health (DH) for reimbursement of medical expenses if the attending HA/DH doctors certify that the drugs, equipment and services concerned are prescribed in accordance with medical necessity and are chargeable by HA or not available in HA/DH.

While the Administration is committed to improving civil service medical benefits within its contractual obligations, it is also opportune to point out that we have to carefully balance competing claims in considering improvements to civil service medical benefits in particular with regard to any proposed extension in the scope of such benefits that would require substantial additional resources, such as the inclusion of Chinese medicine services.

Enhancing the quality of the existing medical services

We have been working closely with HA and DH to explore possible enhancement measures to improve the provision of medical services to civil service eligible persons and have secured additional resources to implement a number of initiatives in the past five years (i.e. 2009-10 to 2013-14).

In terms of resources, the provision allocated to DH to provide medical and dental services to civil service eligible persons has increased from \$677.2M in the 2009-10 Revised Estimates to \$984.1M in the 2013-14 Revised Estimates, representing an increase of 45%. For HA, additional resources have also been provided on top of the Government's annual subvention to provide specific enhanced services for civil service eligible persons exclusively. The full-year provision for such additional resources is around \$85M in 2013-14.

In terms of quantity of services, the fourth Families Clinic located in the New Territories commenced operation in 2010. Additional consultation rooms have been provided to the Hong Kong Families Clinic and the relocated Kowloon Families Clinic. The total number of consultation rooms will be increased from 20 in 2009 to 32 upon the full operation of these new consultation rooms, representing an increase of 60%. For dental services, 35 new general dental surgeries and three orthodontic surgeries commenced services between 2009 and 2014. DH also plans to open another 19 new general dental surgeries upon the completion of fitting-out works and recruitment of Dental Officers. The total number of general dental surgeries and orthodontic surgeries will be increased from 169 and 13 in 2009 to 223 and 16 upon the full operation of the above-mentioned new surgeries, representing an increase of 32% and 23% respectively. HA also set up the Block G Imaging Centre at Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH) in January 2011, provided additional specialist service sessions in Block L of QEH in October 2010, and established the 9H Specialist Clinic in Prince of Wales Hospital and Saturday Specialist Outpatient Clinic in Queen of Mary Hospital in March 2012 and September 2012 respectively. These facilities

provide dedicated diagnostic and general specialist outpatient services to civil service eligible persons exclusively.

In terms of quality of services, as at December 2013, around 80% of DH's dental clinics could maintain an average waiting time for dental recall appointments within 12 months. For the calendar year of 2013, 92% of new dental cases could be offered an appointment within six months and 99% of applications for reimbursement of medical expenses could be processed within four weeks, both exceeding the targets set in the Controlling Officer's Report. The setting up of the above-mentioned Imaging Centre and specialist outpatient clinics have significantly reduced civil service eligible persons' waiting time for the services, by several months to more than one year.

Subject to the approval of the 2014-15 Draft Estimates of Expenditure by the Legislative Council, we will further improve the provision of medical services to civil service eligible persons. The new initiatives include starting the preparation work for setting up a new Families Clinic with ten consultation rooms in New Territories East to provide around 100 000 additional attendances per year; enhancing specialised dental service by setting up four oral-maxillofacial and dental surgeries for the exclusive use of civil service eligible persons with a view to shortening their waiting time for the services from three to around 1.3 years; and adding 14 general dental surgeries.

We will continue to work closely with HA and DH to further enhance the civil service medical services for civil service eligible persons, taking into account the Government's contractual obligation, as well as the cost-effectiveness and financial implications of any proposed improvement measures.

Chinese medicine services

With respect to Chinese medicine services, we have explained at previous Panel meetings (including the most recent Panel meeting on 17 February 2014) that we are not in a position to provide such services as part of the medical and dental benefits for civil service eligible persons. Presently, DH does not operate any Chinese medicine clinics (CMCs). HA also does not operate any CMCs as part of its standard services, although 17 public CMCs operating on a tripartite collaboration model each involving the HA, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and a local university have been commissioned to promote the development of "evidence-based" Chinese medicine. The NGOs are responsible for the day-to-day operation of the public CMCs, and staff of these clinics are employed by them (i.e. they are not HA staff). Having regard to the main purpose of these CMCs and their mode of

operation, CMC services do not form part of HA's standard services, and fall outside the scope of civil service medical benefits under the prevailing policy.

Regarding the proposal on providing Chinese medicine service in Families Clinics, we wish to point out again that DH's role is more of a regulatory body over the Chinese medicine industry. DH's current medical staff do not practise Chinese medicine. We have no plan to introduce such a fundamental change to the service scope of DH's Families Clinics to cover Chinese medicine services.

Nonetheless, we would keep in view any significant changes to the nature and mode of service delivery of Chinese medicine services in the public sector in future that would merit a review on the matter.

Provision of medical and dental benefits to serving non-civil service contract (NCSC) staff and NCSC staff who have been employed for a long time

Civil service and NCSC appointments are two distinct types of employment. Their purposes and circumstances of employment are entirely different. Direct comparison between them would not be appropriate as their terms of employment are not the same. NCSC staff are employed on fixed term contracts with an all-inclusive pay package. As such, no separate medical and dental benefits are provided. That said, in determining the remuneration package for NCSC staff, heads of departments (HoDs) will take into account all the relevant factors, including nature of their duties, conditions of the employment market, recruitment results and cost of living, etc., to ensure that the pay is set at a rate that is competitive with the market level. HoDs will also conduct periodic reviews on the pay of their NCSC staff and make adjustments where appropriate, having regard to the change in cost of living, civil service pay adjustments, the need to facilitate staff retention, market conditions for the jobs in question, the length of service of the staff, etc. We consider that sufficient flexibility has already been given under the existing pay determination and adjustment mechanism to enable HoDs to set attractive and competitive employment packages to recruit and retain their NCSC staff.

Post-retirement medical protection for civil servants who have been appointed in and after 2000

We would like to recap the background on the introduction of the new fringe benefits package in 2000. In March 1999, the Government released a Consultation Document on the Civil Service Reform. The main objective was to put forward proposals to restructure the administration of the Civil Service so as to make it more flexible and prepare the Government to face the changes and

increasingly demanding challenges in the years ahead. Having considered the feedback received during the consultation and after taking into account private sector practices as well as the views from departmental management and staff, relevant advisory bodies and relevant panels of the Legislative Council, the Government revised the fringe benefits package for civil servants (including revised leave terms, housing benefits, retirement benefits, and medical and dental benefits, etc.) and the new package was applied to officers recruited on or after 1 June 2000. The revised fringe benefits are considered adequate in attracting talents to join the Government and retain and motivate them to provide quality services to the public.

According to the new fringe benefits package, civil servants appointed on or after 1 June 2000 would cease to enjoy civil service medical and dental benefits once they leave the service. The package has been devised after careful consideration and consultation with stakeholders concerned as explained above. The Administration has no plan to change the arrangement.

Yours sincerely,



(Miss Winnie Tse)

for Secretary for the Civil Service

c.c. Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-yee, GBS, JP
Chairman, Legislative Council Panel on Public Service

Secretary for Food and Health
(Attn : Miss Ophelia LUI)

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