

**For discussion on
12 July 2021**

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

Drug management of residential care homes

Purpose

This paper sets out the measures taken by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) in respect of drug management in residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs).

Continued enhancement of drug management in residential care homes (RCHs)

2. The Government attaches great importance to the service quality of RCHEs, and has adopted a multi-pronged approach to enhance the services of RCHEs. For drug management in RCHs, the SWD has implemented measures covering various aspects such as system establishment, technological support, and staff training to continuously raise awareness on drug safety and strengthen capability in drug management of RCHEs, with a view to facilitating residents in need to use medication properly and safely so as to safeguard their health. The relevant measures are detailed below.

Assisting RCHs in enhancing drug management system

3. The SWD collaborated with the Department of Health (DH) and the Hospital Authority to review the Operational Manual on Drug Management in RCHEs, and published the revised Guidelines on Drug Management in RCHs in end-August 2018. The guidelines set out clear guidance on the basic principles, procedures and quality assurance

mechanism of drug management in RCHs. Among others, the guidelines cover such areas as establishing effective drug management systems in RCHs, conducting regular medication review for residents and performing drug safety audits in RCHs, and updating records of medication to ensure accuracy. These facilitate the residents to use medication properly and safely, and ensure the RCH staff to implement effective and safe drug management.

4. In addition, the SWD sets out detailed and clear guidelines on drug management in The Code of Practice for Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) (Revised Edition) (the CoP), which has been effective since January 2020. According to the requirements of the CoP, RCHs should arrange staff with relevant training (e.g. nurses or health workers) to be responsible for preparing drugs according to the prescriptions of medical practitioners, giving medication and assisting residents in taking medication safely. The staff should also properly maintain and timely update medication records of the residents.

5. Since October 2018, the SWD has commissioned non-governmental organisations to provide Visiting Medical Practitioner Service for residents in all private and self-financing RCHEs in the territory. Apart from providing timely on-site medical services to residents with episodic illnesses, the visiting medical practitioners would also advise RCHs on maintaining proper health records (including medication records) of residents.

Technology product support

6. The SWD launched the Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care in December 2018. RCHEs receiving subsidies from the SWD may apply for procurement or rental of drug management technology products to assist them in drug management, e.g. automatic tablet dispensing and packaging system, drug management system. Moreover, between 2010-11 and 2020-21, the Social Welfare Development Fund set up by the SWD in 2009 subsidised welfare organisations to implement 16 drug management projects for RCHEs.

Strengthening staff training

7. To continuously enhance the service quality of RCHEs, the SWD launched a five-year Training Subsidy Scheme for Staff of RCHs (the Scheme) in phases starting from March 2019 to provide full subsidies for home managers, health workers and care workers of all RCHEs in the territory to enrol in Qualification Framework-recognised training courses. The content of the “Advanced Training for Health Workers” course under the Scheme, which is designed for in-service health workers, includes basic knowledge and management of drugs.

8. In addition, the SWD has been collaborating with the DH over the past years to organise training programmes on subjects covering drug safety for RCHE staff to enhance their knowledge and skills for taking care of the elderly. For the RCHEs that require improvement in areas related to health care (e.g. drug management), the SWD would refer them to the Visiting Health Teams under Elderly Health Service of the DH for training.

Inspection and law enforcement

9. Since the establishment of the Licensing and Regulation (LR) Branch in May 2017, the SWD has strengthened the inspection mechanism. Having regard to the nature of non-compliance, LR Branch has also formulated specific strategies and action plans, including conducting surprise inspections to RCHs at different times during non-office hours, issuing advice, warnings or written directions to RCHs on items of non-compliance, and instigating prosecution actions. Inspectors of the LR Branch also provide advice to RCHs for improving drug management depending on the actual circumstances during inspections, and issue management letters to RCHs from time to time to remind them to comply with statutory requirements in managing drugs safely. In the past four years, the LR Branch conducted an average of up to 5 500 inspections per year to RCHEs. The total number of non-compliant cases issued with warning notices to RCHEs was 473 and the total number of convicted cases for non-compliance was 118, of which only a minority

concerned drug management.

The Government's legislative amendment exercise

10. To further enhance the regulation of RCHs, the SWD set up the Working Group on the Review of Ordinances and Codes of Practice for Residential Care Homes (Working Group) in June 2017. The Working Group completed the review in May 2019 and put forward various recommendations, among which was to include in the Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) Regulation (Cap. 459A) provisions relating to care service so that RCHs should properly manage drugs and strictly follow doctors' prescription in assisting residents to take medication.

11. The Government is in the process of drafting the legislative amendments, and will, upon completion, submit them to the Legislative Council for scrutiny as soon as practicable. The SWD will continue to liaise closely with the sector and stakeholders to prepare for the implementation of the amended regulation in the future.

Advice sought

12. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

**Labour and Welfare Bureau
Social Welfare Department
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