

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

Carer Support Services

Purpose

This paper provides an update on the provision of support services to carers of the elderly.

Background

2. Carers of the elderly refer to people who provide care to frail elderly people, who suffer from cognitive or physical impairment or chronic illness. The carers are usually the children, spouses, relatives, friends or neighbours. And in Hong Kong's context, carers also include domestic maids. According to an estimate by an academic in Hong Kong, there are about 148 000 carers, who are mainly family carers, i.e. adult children and spouses. The latter are usually elderly people themselves.

3. Family carers provide care to the frail elderly on a daily basis. The caring work usually involves assistance in activities of daily living, such as lifting, transferring and dressing. These may generate physical and mental strain on the carers. Very often, family carers have to perform conflicting roles including parent, spouse and carers in the family; and employees in their work place. Many carers hence experience disruption to their work and social life. Some carers may run into emotional problems. Some may feel frustrated when their caring role is not appreciated or supported by the elderly and other family members. Some feel stressed and burnt out because they have to cope with the demands of the elderly family members. Some may feel guilty when the health conditions of the elderly members deteriorate or when they have to be hospitalized or institutionalized.

4. Carers have their needs too. These include information on common elderly diseases; information on care and support resources in the community; training on care for the frail elderly; respite services; assistance in nursing and personal care; recognition from others and emotional support. To enable more frail elderly people to continue to live at home, we fully recognize the need to provide necessary support to their family carers. To this end, we have set up two carers' support centres since early 1999 to provide information, counselling and training to carers. We also launched a pilot scheme in late 1999 to provide day respite services in day care centres for the elderly.

Furthermore, we have recently completed a review on the existing residential respite service and have identified ways to strengthen the service. These services together help provide temporary reliefs to the family carers who are caring for their elderly family members at home.

Carers' support centres

5. Carers' support centres are set up to provide information, training and emotional support to carers. A variety of services are provided in the centres including -

- (a) training and education programmes including training sessions, talks and demonstration sessions to equip carers with the relevant knowledge and caring skills;
- (b) group activities including mutual help groups to allow carers to share their experiences and receive emotional support from each other. Group activities such as reminiscence groups and reality orientation groups are also organized for the demented elderly to enhance their functioning and provides temporary relief to the carers at the same time;
- (c) social and recreational activities to help relieve stresses of the carers;
- (d) volunteer training so that carers may provide support services to other carers;
- (e) telephone hotline service to provide emotional support and advice to carers;
- (f) resource corners where carers and the public can access to a variety of books, videos and training kits on knowledge and skill in caring for the elderly. Carers' support centres also serve as resource bases for other elderly service units such as day care centres, multi-service centres and social centres for the elderly;
- (g) counselling and referral services by professional social workers. Apart from emotional support, the social workers also render assistance to carers in care planning and to make referrals to other welfare services such as home help service and day respite service; and

- (h) rehabilitation-aid equipment are provided on loan basis to carers.

6. There are two carers' support centres funded by the Government. The Caritas-Hong Kong operates one centre in Sham Shui Po. The Social Welfare Department operates another one in Chai Wan. Both centres were set up in February 1999. Service statistics of the two carers' support centres in the first-year of operation are as follows:

| Service Items | Cumulative Total (2.1999-2.2000) |
|---|---|
| (a) No. of registered carers | 1 818 |
| (b) No. of hotline enquiries received | 389 |
| (c) No. of training and educational programmes | 180 |
| (d) No. of self-help, mutual help and supportive group sessions | 61 |
| (e) No. of promotional and community education programmes | 90 |
| (f) No. of participants who attended skill training, educational, supportive and promotional programmes | 18 578 |
| (g) No. of lending services and demonstration of use of rehabilitation aids | 645 |
| (h) No. of volunteer training sessions | 37 |
| (i) No. of participants in volunteer training | 604 |

So far, users of carers' support centres have provided positive feedback on the services rendered by the centres. Outcome indicators are being developed to measure the effectiveness of the services such as by measuring whether the stress level of carers in caring for their elderly family members has reduced.

Respite services

7. The purpose of respite care is to enable carers to take a rest, participate in social and recreational activities, run errands, visit friends, attend training on their caring roles, etc. Carers can gather strength after taking a break and will be able to perform longer periods of caring tasks with less stress. Three types of respite services are currently available for the frail or cognitively impaired elderly, namely residential respite service, day respite service and home respite service.

Revamped respite service in residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs)

8. As an initiative of the 1998 Policy Address, a Working Group on

Review of Respite Service in RCHEs with representatives from the Social Welfare Department, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service and non-governmental organizations was set up in May 1999. The working group reviewed and evaluated the utilization and effectiveness of existing residential respite service in RCHEs, and examined the service mode and implications of providing respite service on the operating agencies. The review has shown that residential respite service provides useful temporary relief to family carers of elderly people and the service should be maintained. Social Welfare Department will adopt the following recommendations -

- (a) To use all casual vacancies in the existing 77 RCHEs with meal places and 82 RCHEs with care & attention home places for residential respite service at no additional funding implication;
- (b) To simplify the existing application procedures, all laboratory tests would no longer be required for admission screening and only general medical check will be needed;
- (c) To enhance publicity in promoting the use of residential respite service.

9. We shall launch the revamped mode of residential respite service in April 2000. All casual vacancies arising from these subvented homes can then be booked two weeks in advance for respite service. Utilization of the service will continue to be closely monitored, which will be reviewed in a year's time.

Day respite service

10. As an initiative of the 1998 Policy Address, a 3-year pilot project of day respite service for the elderly was launched in October 1999. This experimental project is implemented in 12 day care centres for the elderly, each providing three day respite places. The services provided include personal care, meals and limited nursing care during the daytime. There is no limit on the number of days the elderly can use the service and the charge is \$40 per day. During the 5-month period ending February 2000, 146 frail and demented elderly people used the service. In other words, an equal number of, or more, carers benefited from short periods of relief in their caring tasks. Utilization rate of the service picked up quickly to about 80% in the 4th and 5th months after introduction of the new service.

11. The Social Welfare Department is closely monitoring the performance of these day care centres and will conduct mid-term and final evaluation studies on the effectiveness of the project. As agreed with the

Hong Kong Council of Social Service and the participating day care centres, the evaluation will cover:

- utilization of the service,
- users' and carers' profiles,
- customer feedback on the service,
- the extent to which day respite service can meet local demand,
- service operation mode, and
- its interfacing with other community support services.

We will take into account the results of the evaluation in considering the future direction of this service, including possible expansion of the service to other day care centres.

Home respite service

12. Apart from day respite service and residential respite service for the elderly, home respite service is also available under home help and home care service. With prior arrangements, home helpers or home care workers are available to look after frail elderly people at their homes to release family carers to attend to other personal commitments.

Training

13. Training to the informal carers is one of the most practical support that can be given to them. Under the Chief Executive's Community Project List 1999, the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust has allocated \$10 million to the University of Hong Kong for development of structured multi-disciplinary training materials for both formal and informal carers of the elderly. The project started in October 1999. Informal carers include family members and domestic helpers who are responsible for providing care to frail elderly people at home. The multi-disciplinary training would also enable formal carers to enhance their knowledge and skills in providing care to elderly people in various settings.

14. The training materials will equip the informal carers with practical skills on caring for the elderly and enhance their awareness and understanding of the psychosocial needs of the elderly. The project team has started to run demonstration courses and so far the feedback on the course contents has been very positive. It is planned that the training materials developed under the project will be transferred to other organizations for continual training of carers after completion of the three-year project. The two Carers' Support Centres and other NGOs have already indicated interest in using the materials developed under this project to conduct training courses for carers in future.

Way Forward

15. We will continue to monitor the performance of the two carers' support centres and the day respite services. We will implement the recommendations of the review on residential respite services for the elderly from April 2000 onwards, with a view to extending the services to all subsidized residential care homes for the elderly. We will monitor the progress of the project on development of structured multi-disciplinary training for formal and informal carers in Hong Kong.

16. As one of the initiatives pledged in the 1999 Policy Address, we are working towards putting in place a more extensive carer support network. Apart from the two Carers' Support Centres, carers' support service is currently also provided by a number of multi-service centres for the elderly and day care centres for the elderly. We aim to reinforce carers' support services by involving more elderly service units as delivery agent, while the two carers' support centres will place more emphases on development of carer support programmes, training materials and provision of support to carer support services provided by other elderly care service units. In this connection, we are reviewing the existing community care and support services for the elderly and their family carers. Our aim is to enhance the quality of the existing services and improve the interface among various types of care and support services for the elderly. The review will also cover ways to provide enhanced support services for carers.

Advice sought

17. Members are invited to note the current provision of support to family carers of the elderly and offer their views and comments on the way forward.

Health and Welfare Bureau/Social Welfare Department
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