

LegCo Panel on Health Services

Report on the Funding Position of the Commitment for the Fight against Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)

PURPOSE

This paper reports on the funding position of the \$200 million commitment created for the fight against SARS.

BACKGROUND

2. On 31 March 2003, the Legislative Council Finance Committee (FC) approved the creation of a new commitment of \$200 million to provide additional funds for the fight against SARS. The commitment is to provide additional funding to the Hospital Authority (HA), the Department of Health (DH), the Information Services Department (ISD) and any other bureaux / departments for treatment of patients with SARS, and to step up infection control and public health education, subject to the approval of the Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (SHWF). We informed Members that we would keep this Panel posted on the applications approved on a regular basis.

PRESENT FUNDING POSITION

3. As at 5 June 2003, SHWF have approved eight funding applications at a total sum of **\$148.8 million**. Of this sum, we have allocated \$128.1 million to the Hospital Authority (HA); \$9.3 million to the Department of Health (DH); and a total of \$11.4 million to the Government Supplies Department (GSD), the Constitutional Affairs Bureau (CAB) and the Information Services Department (ISD) to cope with various activities relating to the fight against the SARS.

EXPENDITURE INCURRED

Hospital Authority

4. As at 5 June 2003, we have allocated a total of \$118.1 million to HA for meeting its additional expenditure incurred up to end of April 2003, and another \$10M for enhancing its outreach support to all elderly homes. The expenditure items are detailed as follows.

(A) Additional Manpower

5. As at end of April 2003, about 1 600 patients have been admitted to the public hospitals with SARS, among whom some 360 are health care workers or medical students. There are also about 24 suspected cases under treatment. In order to cope with the excessive and abrupt surge of workload, the Hospital Authority (HA) has strengthened its frontline health care teams by recruiting additional doctors, nursing staff (including temporary undergraduate nursing students) and General Services Assistants / Technical Services Assistants.

6. Apart from health care workers, HA has recruited one medical laboratory technician to carry out the laboratory tests for confirmed and suspected SARS cases, one dispenser to assist in monitoring SARS medication usage in public hospitals and in the central procurement and supply of SARS medications, and additional information officers and IT staff to assist in expediting the dissemination of infection control information to hospitals' frontline staff, and in meeting the urgent needs of developing various SARS related systems. The total additional staff cost incurred up to end of April 2003 amounts to \$4.8 million.

(B) Procurement of Masks and Other Protective Gear

7. To protect its health care staff in all grades from infection, HA has provided all staff concerned with standard protective gear including surgical masks, gowns, gloves, protective clothing against splashing in ordinary ward areas, and water proof clothing against soiling in wards with patients who have dementia or incontinence. More sophisticated protective devices such as face shields and stryker hoods are provided to health care workers engaged in high risk areas / activities. Altogether, a total of some 15.2 million pieces of masks and other protective gear have been procured up to end of April 2003. The total additional expenditure incurred up to end of April 2003 is \$41.8 million.

(C) Drugs, Laboratory Tests and Radiology Materials

8. In treatment of SARS patients, a total of \$24.8 million has been spent on consumption of drugs (including Ribavirin, antibiotics, immunoglobulin). To facilitate early identification of patients with SARS and treatment of confirmed and suspected SARS patients, \$6.4 million has been spent on rapid diagnostic tests and other relevant blood tests and laboratory tests, and X-ray examination radiology materials.

(D) Other Hospital Supplies, Contract Out Services, etc.

9. To step up infection control measures at all hospitals to prevent the spread of SARS, frequent cleansing and disinfection of environment, facilities and equipment in hospitals is vital. Additional utilities and hospital supplies have been procured for stepping up the cleansing and disinfection work in hospitals. With limited manpower available, HA has contracted out some cleansing and security guard services to enhance cleansing, and to strengthen the security guard services after the implementation of the policy of restricting visitors to SARS wards to prevent the disease from spreading into the community. The total additional expenditure incurred up to end of April 2003 for implementing the above infection control measures amounts to \$15.2 million.

(E) Procurement of Medical Equipment and Instruments

10. In addition, HA has procured and delivered to various hospitals additional essential equipment items to meet the urgent needs of SARS patients. These equipment items include: 39 ventilators (including accessories) to assist critically ill patients to breathe; 67 physiologic monitors to monitor severely ill patients' vital signs; 265 infusion pumps to give intravenous infusion accurately; six mobile X-ray machines to diagnose lung damage; 74 pulse oximeters to monitor patients' blood oxygen saturation level; five biological safety cabinets to protect staff from infection when performing potentially aerosol-generating procedures; and other equipment items such as Day Light Loader, Imaging System, Video Endoscopy, etc. The total additional expenditure incurred up to end of April 2003 amounts to \$23.2 million.

(F) Facility Improvement Works

11. To minimize the chance of cross-infection, facility

improvement works at a total cost of \$1.9 million have been carried out in the Prince of Wales Hospital to improve the overall air-exchange rates and alter the pattern of airflow, and to re-arrange the layout of the ward settings.

(G) Enhancing Outreach Support to Elderly

12. In addition to the above initiatives, we have separately allocated \$10 million to HA for enhancing its outreach support to all elderly care homes, including the recruitment of additional visiting medical officers from the private sector, with a view to reducing the admission of elders into hospitals. This is in view that frail elders in residential care homes are a high risk group for SARS. With the support of additional general practitioners being recruited for the purpose, the coverage of the existing Community Geriatric Assessment Teams (CGATs) of HA to these homes has been extended. Over 53 000 elders are covered by the enhanced outreach support of CGATs.

Department of Health

13. As part of our strategy to contain the spread of SARS, the infection control at various control points needs to be strengthened through a number of health control measures. They include health declaration by incoming passengers and temperature checking of all passengers arriving in or departing from various control points. To facilitate the body temperature checking arrangement, \$9.3 million has been allocated to DH for procuring infrared thermal imaging temperature scanning systems.

Government Supplies Department

14. Apart from the above measures, a number of other measures have been introduced to strengthen infection control at the community level. To prevent the spread of SARS at Amoy Gardens, the residents of Block E were moved into three isolation camps on 1 April 2003. During the operation, various household items and daily necessities have been procured for the residents.

15. In addition, some 1 000 vacant flats at Tin Yan Estate and King Hin Court have been furnished as temporary quarters for frontline medical staff in order to minimize the chance of infection among them

and their families.

16. To prepare for possible future outbreaks in the community, another 400 units at Tin Yan Estate have been furnished for use as a reserved isolation centre. Altogether, a total of \$6.2 million has been allocated to GSD for procuring various household items.

Constitutional Affairs Bureau

17. \$0.2 million has been allocated to the CAB for meeting the expenditure for arranging a chartered flight to Taiwan to bring home a quarantined HK tour group after one of its members, a 6-year-old girl, had shown SARS symptoms and was suspected of being infected with SARS.

Information Services Department

18. To raise the awareness of the community on the prevention of SARS, ISD in collaboration with other bureaux / departments have been carrying out an intensive publicity campaign since mid-March 2003. The campaign covers the production of leaflets, posters, signage, radio and TV Announcement of Public Interests, display of health advice in public transport systems/outdoor areas and placement of advertisements in newspapers. \$5.0 million has been allocated to the ISD for carrying out this publicity campaign.

EARMARKED EXPENDITURE ITEMS

19. As at 5 June 2003, there is a remaining balance of \$51.2 million. There will be allocations to DH for meeting the additional expenditure incurred on enhanced port health measures, procurement of additional infrared thermal scanners at various control points, and procurement of additional masks and protective gear for use by frontline staff during major infection control operations including evacuation, home confinement and disinfection work. Further, it is noted that the fund so far approved for HA covers expenditure incurred up to end April 2003. Additional funding is required for SARS related expenditure incurred thereafter. By way of reference, HA's estimated commitments to be incurred in May and June could be up to \$300 million, of which substantial amount have been/would be spent on the procurement of

protective gears, equipment and instruments, recruitment of additional staff and facilities improvement.

WAY FORWARD

20. The expenditure incurred so far has already exhausted up to about 75% of the total \$200 million commitment for the fight against the SARS. As at 5 June 2003, there are still 121 SARS patients under treatment in the hospitals. Although the number of additional confirmed cases per day has declined and stabilised, we should continue to step up infection control measures and public education to prevent the spread and revival of the disease. Additional funding to cope with the related activities is therefore required.

21. At the FC meeting held on 31 March 2003, we informed Members that depending on need, we might need to increase the funding commitment for the fight against SARS. In light of the committed funding requirements of HA in May and June 2003 and the estimated funding requirements of HA in the coming months, as well as the additional funding required for DH's efforts on infection control, we are preparing a detailed proposal for an increase in the funding commitment with a view to seeking FC's approval on the proposal on 27 June 2003.

ADVICE SOUGHT

22. Members are requested to note the latest funding position for the fight against SARS and the Administration's intention to seek an increase in the funding commitment.

June 2003
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau