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Ms Doris Chan
Clerk to Panel
Panel on Health Services
Legislative Council
8 Jackson Road
Central

Dear Ms Chan,

Hospital Authority Private Service Fees

During the discussion on the proposal of the Hospital Authority (HA) for adjusting its private consultation fees at the meeting of the Panel on 13 June 2005, Members asked about the costs for providing private service at individual public hospitals for different specialties with different levels of expertise and whether the introduction of the revised fees would lengthen the waiting time for patients seeking public health service at different specialties in individual public hospitals, and if so, the extent of the impact. I am now writing to provide a written response.

The cost of private consultations in public hospitals can be attributed to two main factors – level of medical expertise involved in the provision of the service and the complexity of the patients' clinical conditions. In respect of the factor of medical expertise, there are two main levels, namely the Associate Professor / Specialist level and the Professor / Consultant level. Taking into account the salaries and oncost as well as the relevant administrative overhead costs, the estimated unit costs of private consultations are \$1,650 per hour for the Associate Professor / Specialist level and \$2,250 per hour for the Professor / Consultant level respectively. As for the factor of the complexity of the patients' clinical condition, it is mainly accounted for by time spent by the medical practitioner in the consultations. For the purpose of setting the charges, the HA categorizes consultations into three levels of complexity – low,

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medium and high – and determines the charges on the basis that they will take up 20 minutes, 40 minutes and 60 minutes of the medical practitioner's time respectively. The charge for a simple consultation given by an Associate Professor / Specialist is \$550 and that for a complex consultation by a Professor / Consultant is \$2,250. Since the remuneration packages for medical practitioners in public hospitals do not vary amongst the various specialties, it is not a major factor affecting the cost of private consultations.

The introduction of the revised fee for private consultations in public hospitals would not lengthen the waiting time for patients seeking public health service in individual public hospitals. This is because the HA would not vary the numbers of sessions and consultations available for its public specialist out-patient service due to changes in the demand of its private service.

Sorry for not being able to revert earlier.

Yours sincerely,



(Paul Cheng)
for Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food

cc CE/HA (Attn: Dr K H Lee)