

**For Information
on 28 February 2012**

Panel on Health Services

Use of obstetric services by non-local women

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members on the provision of obstetric services to non-local women by public and private hospitals in Hong Kong.

GOVERNMENT'S POLICY ON OBSTETRIC SERVICES

2. The Government's policy is to ensure that Hong Kong residents are given proper and priority obstetric services. The number of non-local women (mainly Mainland women) seeking to give births in Hong Kong has been increasing rapidly in recent years. It has caused tremendous pressure on the capacity of obstetric service in public hospitals and affected the provision of such service to Hong Kong residents. In response to this rising trend, the Hospital Authority (HA) has since 1 February 2007 implemented revised arrangements for providing obstetric services to non-local women.

3. Under the revised arrangements, all Non-eligible Persons (NEPs^{*}) who wish to seek obstetric services in public hospitals have to make prior booking and pay a package charge of \$39,000. For cases of delivery by emergency admission through the Accident and Emergency Departments (A&EDs) and/or without having attended any antenatal attendance at a HA specialist outpatient clinic during the concerned pregnancy, the charge would be \$48,000. Private hospitals are also required to issue a booking certificate to non-local women who have made obstetric service booking to facilitate checking by immigration officers when they enter Hong Kong (see paragraph 8 below). The purpose of these revised arrangements is to ensure that Hong Kong resident women are given priority for proper obstetric services, to limit the number of non-local women coming to Hong Kong to give births to a level that can be supported by our healthcare system, and to deter non-local pregnant

^{*} Our public healthcare services are available to our local residents (as Eligible Persons) at highly subsidized rates. Non-local people (as Non-eligible Persons) have to pay the specified charges applicable to them for access to our public healthcare services.

women from the dangerous behaviour of seeking emergency hospital admissions through A&EDs shortly before labour.

LATEST SITUATION OF DEMAND OF OBSTETRIC SERVICES

4. Notwithstanding the new measures, the demand for local obstetric services from both local and non-local women (mainly from the Mainland) has continued to rise since 2007. The total number of live births born in Hong Kong has risen from 70 875 in 2007 to some 95 500 in 2011, of which the number of live births born to Mainland women has increased from 27 574 to over 43 900. A breakdown of the numbers of live births born to local and Mainland women in Hong Kong in the past 12 years is at **Annex A**. The total numbers of deliveries in public and private hospitals are about 45 400 and 49 000 respectively in 2011. The deliveries figures at public and private hospitals in 2011, with breakdown of deliveries by local and non-local women, are at **Annex B**.

5. To further control the number of non-local women seeking to give births in Hong Kong, the Food and Health Bureau (FHB) in June 2011 discussed with HA, the Department of Health (DH), the 10 private hospitals providing obstetric services and the professional groups of the obstetricians and paediatricians, and agreed to introduce the following new measures to control the use of obstetric services by non-local women and alleviate the pressure on the overall obstetric and neonatal services in Hong Kong:

- (a) the number of non-local pregnant women giving birth in Hong Kong in 2012 will be limited to 35 000. The delivery places at public and private hospitals for non-local women are estimated to be 3 400 and 31 000 respectively. HA will stop accepting bookings once this service capacity is full or when more capacity has to be reserved to cope with increase in demand of local women;
- (b) non-local pregnant women who intend to have deliveries in Hong Kong will be required to undergo antenatal checkups by obstetricians in Hong Kong at an appropriate stage. The Hong Kong College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists published guidelines in September 2011 to assist obstetricians in examining non-local pregnant women, so that high-risks pregnancy cases may be denied giving birth in Hong Kong to avoid subjecting these

women to additional risks associated with travelling;

- (c) the delivery booking certificates of public and private hospitals have been standardized since end September 2011 to facilitate checking of non-local women at the boundary control points and tracking of the record of antenatal check-ups; and
- (d) the quota of delivery by non-local women in 2013 will be determined after discussion among the Government, HA and the private hospitals in the first quarter of 2012.

6. To ensure sufficient places in public hospitals are reserved to meet the demand of local pregnant women, HA would regularly review the demand for its obstetric service and would only accept booking from NEP when spare service capacity is available. Once the service capacity is reached, HA would stop making bookings for non-local pregnant women. In anticipation of rising service demand from local women in 2011, on 8 April 2011 HA suspended booking of obstetric services by non-local women until the end of 2011.

7. Following the decision by HA to cease accepting booking from non-local women, the number of deliveries by non-local women at public hospitals via A&EDs has been increasing from 86 in April 2011 to 204 in December 2011. Of these cases, about 26% had made prior bookings with public hospitals but were unable to arrive at the booked hospital in time for delivery. Separately, about 26% of these cases in 2011 involved non-local women with Hong Kong spouses. The numbers of emergency deliveries via A&EDs in 2010 and 2011 are at **Annex C**.

ENHANCED MEASURES TO CONTROL THE USE OF OBSTETRIC SERVICE BY NON-LOCAL WOMEN

8. To prevent non-local women without prior booking of obstetric service from “gate-crashing” the A&EDs, non-local pregnant women are required to produce the confirmation certificate for checking by immigration officers at the boundary control points when they enter Hong Kong. Those cannot produce the confirmation certificate may be refused entry. In response to the rise of the number of emergency delivery cases by non-local women without prior booking, relevant government departments have stepped up boundary control measures and enforcement action against agents and

collaborators who assist non-local women to give births in Hong Kong. DH has deployed an additional 18 health surveillance assistants to various passenger control points to support the operation of the immigration officers. They will assist with the assessment of the stage of pregnancy and screening of passengers and, in particular, cross-boundary vehicles which pose the highest risk of assisting non-local pregnant women to enter Hong Kong and evade screening. To tackle the problem at source, the Hong Kong law enforcement agencies have enhanced cooperation with their Mainland counterparts in intelligence exchange to seek to stamp out the operation of agents and syndicates on both sides of the boundaries.

9. In concert with the enhanced boundary control measures and to prevent non-local pregnant from entering Hong Kong early and going into hiding in order to evade the screening process, the Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA) of the Home Affairs Department has stepped up inspection and enforcement efforts against unlicensed guesthouses, including conducting more frequent inter-departmental joint operations with the Police, and collecting evidence proactively by posing as clients through undercover operation. They have also worked closely with the Estate Agents Authority and the Office of the Commissioner for Insurance to take enforcement actions against the illegal practices of estate agency practitioners and insurance agency practitioners.

10. To encourage public rental housing (PRH) tenants to report suspected abusive use of PRH flats (including letting flats to non-local pregnant women), the Housing Department has also stepped up publicity and education, and will detect and follow-up any suspected tenancy abuses cases under the established mechanism, such as through routine and surprise flat inspections.

11. Separately, HA is currently reviewing the fees for deliveries by NEPs at A&EDs. The review will take into account the costs of services as well as the price being charged for comparable services by private hospitals and aim to raise the fees of emergency delivery to a sufficient level to deter non-local pregnant women from seeking emergency admission to A&EDs for delivery to bypass the booking system.

DELIVERY QUOTA FOR 2013

12. The Government will review the measures introduced last year in the first quarter of 2012. FHB will shortly commence discussions with HA and

private hospitals on their respective delivery plans for 2013. In view of the steadily rising local birth rate in recent years it is expected that the quota for NEP deliveries in 2013 will be lower than that for 2012 and may be further reduced if necessary. In setting the quota, we will take into consideration the capacity of the public and private hospitals, priority to be given to local pregnant women, the need to provide sufficient delivery places for training of obstetric specialists by HA, as well as the demand for neonatal intensive care services.

WAY FORWARD

13. Following the implementation of the enhanced boundary control measures and vigorous actions taken by the law enforcement agencies and OLA, the number of non-booked delivery cases at A&EDs in January has started to decline compared to that in the previous months. The Government will closely monitor the situation and continue to step up and sustain the various measures to prevent and deter non-local women from entering Hong Kong to give births without prior booking of obstetric service, and to ensure that sufficient capacity of obstetric service is reserved to meet the demand of Hong Kong residents.

Food and Health Bureau
February 2012

Number of live births born in Hong Kong

Year	Number of live births (1) (2)	Live births to local women (2)	Number of live births born in HK to Mainland women:			
			Whose spouses are HK Permanent Residents	Whose spouses are not HK Permanent Residents (3)	Others (4)	Sub-total
2000	54 134	45 961	7 464	709	–	8 173
2001	48 219	40 409	7 190	620	–	7 810
2002	48 209	39 703	7 256	1 250	–	8 506
2003	46 965	36 837	7 962	2 070	96	10 128
2004	49 796	36 587	8 896	4 102	211	13 209
2005	57 098	37 560	9 879	9 273	386	19 538
2006	65 626	39 494	9 438	16 044	650	26 132
2007	70 875	43 301	7 989	18 816	769	27 574
2008	78 822	45 257	7 228	25 269	1 068	33 565
2009	82 095	44 842	6 213	29 766	1 274	37 253
2010	88 584	47 936	6 169	32 653	1 826	40 648
2011	95 418#	51 436	6 110	35 736	2 136	43 982

- Notes :
- (1) The figures refer to the total number of live births born in HK in the reference period counted by the occurrence time of the events (i.e. births actually taking place in that reference period).
 - (2) The figures include a very small number of live births born in HK to foreign women (e.g. Philippine), which are minor compared to live births born in HK to Mainland women.
 - (3) Include HK Non-permanent Residents (Persons from the Mainland having resided in HK for less than 7 years being grouped in this category) and non-HK residents.
 - (4) Mainland mothers chose not to provide the father's residential status during birth registration.
 - Not available.
 - # Provisional figures.

Source: C&SD

Annex B

Number of deliveries and bookings at public hospitals in 2011

		Number of deliveries
Eligible Persons		34 891
Non-eligible persons	Admitted directly to hospital	8 824
	Admitted via A&ED	1 657(438)^{Note 1}
Total		45 372

Note: The number in bracket refers to the cases with booking but unable to admit to the booked hospitals in time.

Number of deliveries and bookings at private hospitals in 2011

	Number of deliveries
Local pregnant women	15 459
Non-local pregnant women^{Note 2}	33465
Total	48 924

Notes:

- (1) The number in bracket refers to the number of deliveries by Non-eligible persons (NEPs) whose spouses are Hong Kong residents. NEPs are not obliged to disclose the resident status of their spouses when using HA's service and hence the figures are provided based on the information available to HA.
- (2) There is no breakdown on the number of non-local women using private obstetric services whose spouses are Hong Kong residents.

Annex C

Number of deliveries by NEPs via public hospital A&EDs

	2010	2011	2012
Jan	55	86	179 (22)
Feb	50	70	N/A
Mar	50	71	
Apr	51	86	
May	42	103	
Jun	52	122	
Jul	54	155	
Aug	74	156	
Sep	84	175	
Oct	93	224	
Nov	103	205	
Dec	88	204	
Yearly total	796 (435)	1657 (438)	

Notes:

- * 34% of the total delivery cases have prior booking in public hospitals but were unable to admit to the booked hospitals in time.

- # The number in bracket refers to the cases with booking but unable to admit to the booked hospitals in time.