

**For discussion on
14 October 2024**

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

Drug management of residential care homes for the elderly

Purpose

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

Drug safety and management

2. The Government endeavours to enhance the services of RCHEs through a multi-pronged approach, thus safeguarding the well-being of RCHE residents. The Residential Care Homes Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Ordinance 2023 (the Amendment Ordinance) was gazetted on 16 June 2023 with major amendments in respect of strengthening the accountability of RCHE operators, enhancing the minimum staffing requirement, increasing the minimum area of floor space per resident, and enhancing the regulation of medicine administration, etc. Relevant measures are being implemented progressively. The Amendment Ordinance stipulates that RCHEs shall keep drugs in a proper place and administer drugs strictly in accordance with prescriptions given by registered medical practitioners, registered Chinese medicine practitioners or listed Chinese medicine practitioners. Besides, the SWD continues to raise the awareness of RCHEs of drug safety and strengthen their capability in drug management by implementing various measures on guidance and regulation, application of technology and staff training, with a view to ensuring that residents use medication in a proper and safe manner so as to safeguard their health.

Guidance and Regulation

3. The SWD, in collaboration with the Department of Health (DH) and the Hospital Authority (HA), published the revised Guidelines on Drug Management in Residential Care Homes (the Guidelines) in end August 2018. The Guidelines sets out clear guidance on the basic principles, procedures and quality assurance mechanism for drug management in RCHEs, which include, *inter alia*, that RCHEs should put in place an effective drug management system, conduct regular medication review for residents and update medication administration records to ensure accuracy. In addition, the Code of Practice for Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) issued by the SWD stipulates that RCHEs should arrange staff with relevant training (such as nurses or health workers) to prepare drugs according to the prescriptions of medical practitioners, give drugs and assist residents in taking medication safely. The staff should also properly maintain, and update in a timely manner, medication records of residents.

4. To ensure that the services of the RCHEs comply with the requirements, the Licensing Office of Residential Care Homes for the Elderly (LORCHE) of SWD formulates inspection strategy, frequency and action plan for individual homes having regard to the needs and risk assessment. During inspections, LORCHE inspectors will, based on actual circumstances, make recommendations to RCHEs on improving drug management. LORCHE also issues management letters to RCHEs from time to time reminding them to comply with the statutory requirements relating to safe handling of drugs. In the past five years, LORCHE conducted an average of 5 600 inspections to RCHEs per year. It issued 549 warnings in total to RCHEs for their non-compliance, and there were 103 convicted cases of which only a handful concerned drug management.

Staff training

5. To keep on enhancing RCHEs' service quality, the SWD launched a five-year Training Subsidy Scheme for Staff of Residential Care Homes (the Subsidy Scheme) from March 2019, offering full subsidies for home managers, health workers and care workers of all RCHEs and Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities (RCHDs) across the territory to take training courses recognised by the Qualifications Framework. Having regard to the effectiveness of the

Subsidy Scheme and views of the sector, the SWD has extended the Subsidy Scheme for three years since 1 April 2024 to fund more staff of RCHEs and RCHDs to attend the relevant courses. As at end June 2024, a total of 521 in-service health workers have enrolled in the “Advanced Training for Health Workers” course under the Subsidy Scheme, covering topics such as basic knowledge and management of drugs, as well as mechanism on quality assurance, involving an expenditure of about \$3.1 million.

6. Moreover, the SWD has been collaborating with the DH over the past years to organise training programmes for RCHE staff on subjects covering drug safety so as to enhance their knowledge and skills for taking care of the elderly. The SWD also refers those RCHEs that require improvement in health care including drug management to the Visiting Health Teams under Elderly Health Service of the DH for training.

Application of technology products

7. The Government allocated \$1 billion to set up the Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care (I&T Fund) in December 2018, with an additional injection of \$1 billion thereto in 2024-25, for subsidising eligible elderly service units to procure, rent or trial technology products. As at June 2024, the I&T Fund has approved grants totalling about \$750 million, subsidising about 2 000 service units to procure or rent over 21 000 items of technology products, including pouch packaging machines and drug management system. In addition, between 2010-11 and 2020-21, the Social Welfare Development Fund launched by the SWD has provided funding support for welfare organisations to carry out 16 projects on drug management of RCHEs.

Other related measures

8. Apart from ensuring proper drug management in RCHEs, the Government is proactive in promoting the health of RCHE residents and reducing their waiting time for medical consultation and medication collection at hospitals. Since October 2018, the SWD has commissioned non-governmental organisations to provide Visiting Medical Practitioner Service to residents of all private and self-financing RCHEs in Hong Kong. In general, the visiting medical practitioners

pay visits to the RCHEs twice a week, treating seasonal influenza and episodic illnesses, as well as rendering advice on proper maintenance of health records (including medication records) of residents.

9. Separately, the Health Bureau (HHB) is exploring launching a community pharmacy programme, aiming to facilitate patients receiving government-subsidised healthcare services in the community to purchase drugs and receive professional pharmaceutical services. This includes the provision of drug dispensing, management and related pharmaceutical services by community pharmacies to RCHEs. The HHB is actively planning the service model of the community pharmacy programme and is committed to researching drug supply methods and the development of related information systems. Market consultation is expected to be launched by the end of 2024.

Advice sought

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

Labour and Welfare Bureau
Health Bureau
Social Welfare Department
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