CB(2)1594/99-00(04)

For information
10 April 2000

LegCo Panel on Health Services

Progress on Development of Laboratory Automation System

Purpose

This paper reports on the progress of developing the Laboratory Automation System (LAS) in the Pathology Service of Department of Health (DH) and examines the feasibility of allowing the private sector to make use of the system.

Background

2. On 3 October 1997, the Finance Committee approved the application of $33M for DH to set up a LAS in its Clinical Pathology Laboratory Centre (CPLC) at Lek Yuen for preparing specimens for routine biochemistry and haematology tests. The Finance Committee requested the Administration to explore the feasibility of allowing the private sector to make use of the spare capacity of the system to offset costs. It was agreed that the issue should be followed up by the Panel on Health Services.

Laboratory Automation System

3. LAS is a laboratory equipment system which performs diagnostic tests in the specialties of biochemistry and haematology. It consists of an automatic specimen preparation system and an automatic specimen transport and loading system. It can greatly improve the efficiency and reliability of DH's pathology services by automating the current manual process in handling specimens for routine biochemistry and haematology tests. LAS has been widely used in laboratories of advanced countries such as USA, Canada, Japan and some European countries.

Progress

4. The contract for the supply of LAS was awarded in December 1999 through open tender. There had been a slippage due to the withdrawal of the recommended supplier from the tender at the final stage in February 1999. According to the revised implementation schedule, the LAS together with its connected analyzers will be delivered and installed in August 2000. Subject to system testing and user training, the LAS will be operational in January 2001.

Feasibility of allowing the Private Sector to make use of the System

5. At present, DH's pathology services are available to the private sector at a charge, but so far the demand for such service has been small. This practice will continue as long as DH has the spare capacity to do so.

6. In 1999, the routine biochemistry and haematology tests processed by DH amounted to about 773 000 specimens, and are expected to increase by 7% annually. The design throughput of a maximum of 1 200 000 specimens per year of the LAS will be achieved by 2003/04. While priority will be given to meeting DH's own service requirements, more test requests from the private sector could be processed upon the operation of the LAS.

Department of Health
April 2000