

LCQ9: Pharmacists practising in community pharmacies

Following is a question by the Hon Shiu Ka-fai and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (November 27):

Question:

Some representatives of the pharmacy trade and pharmacists have relayed to me that registered pharmacists practising in community pharmacies may perform an important function of enhancing primary healthcare services, thereby alleviating the burden on the public healthcare system. For example, they may provide members of the public with services such as drug consultation and inspection, guidance on proper medication, simple tests (measuring cholesterol, blood glucose and blood pressure levels), and advice on seeking medical treatment. On the other hand, the pharmaceutical trade has been fighting for over a decade for implementing in Hong Kong a system of separation of prescribing from dispensing of drugs (SPD) (i.e. doctors being responsible for disease diagnosis and prescription only while pharmacists for drug dispensing). However, the Government has not given any definite response so far. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) given that pharmacists are not included in the 10 types of healthcare professionals covered by the current Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme, whether the Government will include pharmacists in the Scheme to increase the options of primary healthcare services available to the elderly under the Scheme; if so, of the details and implementation timetable; if not, the reasons for that;
- (2) whether it studied, in the past three years, the functions that may be performed by registered pharmacists in primary healthcare services; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will conduct such a study expeditiously;
- (3) given that at present, quite a number of places (e.g. the United States, the United Kingdom, Taiwan, Beijing and Macao) have implemented SPD, whether the Government will make reference to the relevant practices and implement SPD in Hong Kong expeditiously; if so, of the details and implementation timetable; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (4) whether it has assessed the conditions that need to be met in order to achieve the dispensing of drugs in qualified community pharmacies to patients with prescriptions by doctors in public hospitals; whether it will launch a pilot scheme which adopts this drug dispensing method to ameliorate the manpower shortage problem in public hospitals and provide patients with an additional option; if so, of the details and implementation timetable of such a scheme; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Shiu Ka-fai is as follows:

(1) Currently, the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme (the Scheme) subsidises eligible Hong Kong elders aged 65 or above with an annual voucher amount of \$2,000 to use private primary healthcare services provided by 10 types of healthcare professionals, viz. medical practitioners, Chinese medicine practitioners, dentists, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, radiographers, medical laboratory technologists, chiropractors and optometrists with Part I registration under the Supplementary Medical Professions Ordinance (Cap. 359). Vouchers can be used for preventive, curative and rehabilitative services, including the treatment or services prescribed and provided by participating healthcare service providers in their professional capacity to meet the healthcare needs of elders after consultation, as well as the medication and healthcare products provided to elders during the course of treatment. Since the launch of the Scheme, the Government has stipulated that vouchers cannot be used for sole purchase of products such as medication or healthcare products in order to prevent abuse (e.g. purchase of product that is not used by the elder himself/ herself).

When considering whether to expand the types of healthcare service providers under the Scheme, the Government needs to take into account the services that can be provided by the newly added healthcare service providers in the community, the elders' needs for and receptiveness to the relevant services, the risk of abuse of the vouchers, and the views of different stakeholders, etc. As shown in the outcome of the review of the Scheme completed by the Department of Health earlier this year, the majority of elders interviewed considered the coverage of healthcare services under the Scheme sufficient. We will keep on reviewing the operation of the Scheme, with a view to ensuring that the Scheme can continue to meet the Government's objective of enhancing primary healthcare services for the elderly.

(2) In a bid to shift the emphasis of the present healthcare system and mindset from treatment-oriented to prevention-focused, the Food and Health Bureau is now setting up District Health Centres (DHC) in all 18 districts across the territory for providing district-based primary healthcare services through medical-social collaboration and public-private partnership. The aim is to enhance the public's capability in self-management of health and provide support for the chronically ill.

Through the operator and engagement of private healthcare network, DHC provides primary, secondary and tertiary prevention services. The government-funded services in DHC, including health promotion, health assessment, chronic disease management and community rehabilitation, will be provided by a multidisciplinary team, comprising nurses, allied health professionals, pharmacists, social workers and supporting staff.

Pharmacists are one of the core members of DHC's multidisciplinary team. The first DHC in Kwai Tsing District commenced operation in September 2019. Currently, the Kwai Tsing DHC has engaged a full-time pharmacist to provide medication consultation services to the clients in order to maximise the benefit of drug treatment, reduce reliance and lower risk in the use of medicines. The pharmacist will also work with other professionals of the multidisciplinary team in health promotion and health education activities.

Taking into account the experience gained from the Kwai Tsing DHC, we will adopt an evidence-based approach to evaluate the effectiveness of DHC key services. Under the guidance of the Steering Committee on Primary Healthcare Development, we will review ways to further expand other primary healthcare services through DHC and the coordination between the professionals to align with the development of primary healthcare.

(3) and (4) Under the current arrangement in the public healthcare system, doctors are responsible for consultation and prescription, while pharmacists are responsible for the dispensing of drugs. In addition, patients have the right to ask their doctors at private clinics for a prescription and obtain the drugs from pharmacists in community pharmacies. However, if a comprehensive separation of prescribing from dispensing of drugs were to be mandated, it would have far-reaching implications on, amongst others, the current role of doctors in solo-practice, manpower demand for pharmacists and medical expenditure of the public. It would also involve a major shift in the health seeking behaviour of the public. The matter would require an extensive and thorough discussion by the community as a whole.

As regards the arrangement to allow dispensing of drugs in qualified community pharmacies to patients with prescriptions by doctors in public hospitals, it involves various considerations including legal responsibility, protection of patient privacy and resource allocation. Issues regarding the supply, management and quality assurance of drugs, service certification, fee arrangement, and the division of responsibilities between community pharmacists and pharmacists of the Hospital Authority in the treatment of patients throughout the entire service process, etc. also require careful consideration.

We consider that any changes to be introduced should be conducive to the co-operation between doctors and pharmacists and that the well-being of patients should prevail. Before making any major changes, a consensus should be reached by members of the community. The Government will continue to listen to the views of all the stakeholders.

[Hong Kong Customs seizes suspected](#)

[illicit cigarettes \(with photos\)](#)

Hong Kong Customs yesterday (November 26) seized about 680 000 suspected illicit cigarettes with an estimated market value of about \$1.8 million and a duty potential of about \$1.3 million at Lok Ma Chau Control Point.

Customs officers intercepted an incoming truck declared as carrying bricks at Lok Ma Chau Control Point yesterday. After inspection, Customs officers found the batch of suspected illicit cigarettes enclosed by bricks on six pallets.

During the operation, a 67-year-old male driver was arrested and the truck suspected to be in connection with the case was also detained.

Investigation is ongoing.

Smuggling is a serious offence. Under the Import and Export Ordinance, any person found guilty of importing or exporting unmanifested cargo is liable to a maximum fine of \$2 million and imprisonment for seven years.

Members of the public may report any suspected illicit cigarette activities to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).



[LCQ8: Development and application of autonomous vehicles](#)

Following is a question by the Hon Martin Liao and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (November 27):

Question:

The Transport and Housing Bureau has recently indicated that the Government "will consider legislative amendments to stipulate the conditions and supporting measures required for trials of autonomous vehicles so as to foster a suitable and safe road environment for such trials and promote the development and application of autonomous vehicles". In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the specific plans and contents in respect of its work in considering legislative amendments, and whether it has formulated plans to facilitate the conduct of trials of autonomous vehicles (AVs) in ordinary road environment under safe circumstances;

(2) of the details of the trials of various models of AVs conducted currently at designated locations in Hong Kong, as well as the technological development stage reached so far;

(3) whether it has assessed the material support that needs to be provided by the Government to facilitate the development of autonomous driving in Hong Kong, e.g. assisting in perfecting the innovation and technology ecosystem that comprises essential elements such as big data, advanced networks, smart road infrastructure; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) whether it will follow the practices of some technologically advanced places by formulating a strategy and interim development goals for the development of AV transport and drawing up a roadmap and an implementation timetable for this purpose; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) as it is anticipated by some technologically advanced places that AVs not only can generate huge business opportunities, but may also, along with the continued development of technologies such as artificial intelligence and ultra high-speed network, bring revolutionary changes to the way in which a society operates, including significantly enhancing road safety, providing highly efficient transportation services featured by public and private passenger and freight transport that operates on a round-the-clock and beck-and-call basis, enabling the efficient use of roads and reducing the demand for car parking spaces, and significantly reducing the need for owning a vehicle, whether the authorities have also articulated a vision for the development of autonomous driving in Hong Kong; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to the various parts of the Hon Martin Liao's question on promoting the development and application of autonomous vehicles (AVs) is as follows:

The Government published the Smart City Blueprint for Hong Kong (the

Blueprint) in December 2017, aiming at building Hong Kong into a world-class smart city. In recent years, as one of the Smart Mobility initiatives, the Transport Department (TD) has strived to facilitate trials of AVs at suitable locations in Hong Kong as well as the development and application of AV technology.

With the rapid development of AV technology in recent years, various road tests have been conducted across the world in the hope of improving road safety, alleviating traffic congestion, enhancing mobility of citizens, increasing productivity and reducing emission by means of new modes of transportation. Specifically, AV technology could hopefully reduce traffic accidents caused by human factors, thereby enhancing road safety, while improved transport efficiency could cut down the use of fuel and its emission, and enhance our living environment and strengthen Hong Kong's competitiveness in the long run.

On facilitation of trials of AV technology, TD has since mid-2017 issued "Movement Permits for Autonomous Vehicles" to eight different models of AVs, enabling 25 trials to take place at designated routes under safe environment. The trial sites include Zero Carbon Building, West Kowloon Cultural District, Hong Kong Science Park, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Tai Po Industrial Estate, Hong Kong Air Cargo Terminals and Hong Kong Productivity Council, etc. Moreover, TD issued in December 2017 "A Guide on Application for Movement Permit for Test, Trial and/or Demonstration of Autonomous Vehicles on Roads within Designated Sites in Hong Kong" to help the trade understand the requirements and procedures for application.

To further promote the development of AV technology in the city, TD has earlier on set up the Technical Advisory Committee on the Application of Autonomous Vehicle Technologies in Hong Kong. The Committee, comprising representatives and experts from the trade and relevant research and development institutes, will explore how best to draw up an appropriate regulatory framework for AVs. TD will work in close collaboration and liaison with the trade and make reference to local experience of trials of AV technology when contemplating the long-term regulatory framework with necessary legal backing. Meanwhile, TD is drafting a new set of "Guidance Notes on the Trials of Autonomous Vehicles" so that the trade could have a firmer grasp of the requirements for conducting more sophisticated AV trials on roads under the existing legislation.

At the same time, TD has commenced studying necessary legislative amendments with a view to allowing the industry to conduct trials of innovative technologies through a "regulatory sandbox" approach while maintaining close liaison with the industry to jointly stipulate the regulatory model for AVs as well as the conditions and supporting measures required for trials of AVs. The objective is to foster a suitable and safe road environment for such trials. We will conduct relevant research in full swing and report our findings to the relevant Panel of the Legislative Council in due course.

Separately, as set out in the Blueprint, the Government will facilitate

technology advancement and industry development in vehicle-to-everything (V2X) and AVs, with the ultimate objective of introducing AVs with V2X incorporated. In this connection, TD will continue to maintain close contact with, and render assistance to, organisations which have expressed interest in setting up testing facilities for AV technologies or conducting trials of AVs. TD will also examine the feasibility of conducting joint trials of new AVs and related technologies on public roads. In her 2019 Policy Address, the Chief Executive has also proposed an initiative related to promotion of vehicle technology and indicated that the Government will prepare for the setting up of a Smart Traffic Fund dedicated to the transport field, with \$1 billion earmarked for providing enterprises or organisations with funding support for research into and application of vehicle-related innovation and technology.

In the long run, when AV technology has become more advanced and relevant international technical standards have emerged, TD will formulate in due course the long-term regulatory framework with necessary legal backing to replace the "regulatory sandbox" in the regulation of AVs. Meanwhile, the Government will continue to act as an effective "facilitator" and "promoter" by proactively promoting the development and application of AVs in Hong Kong.

[LCQ12: Modification works for public play spaces](#)

Following is a question by the Hon Tony Tse and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (November 27):

Question:

The Chief Executive has indicated in this year's Policy Address that the Government "plan(s) to modify more than 170 public play spaces managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) over the next five years. To make the facilities more innovative and fun, while meeting the needs of residents, LCSD will encourage and promote community participation and public engagement in the process of modifying these facilities". In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the locations and areas of the aforesaid public play spaces, as well as the timetable and estimated expenditure for the relevant modification works;

(2) whether it will consider organising an open design competition for the modification works for public play spaces in order to make the relevant facilities more innovative and fun through engaging the participation of the relevant professionals; and

(3) whether it will make special arrangements for the modification works at the policy or tender level to encourage more small and medium enterprises, start-up companies and less experienced professionals to participate in the relevant works?

Reply:

President,

The reply to the question raised by Hon Tony Tse is as follows:

(1) The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) plans to transform more than 170 of its public play spaces (PPS) across the territory over the next five years. It is initially expected that 17 transformation projects will be launched in the first year of the programme. Details of the projects have yet to be worked out. The total estimated expenditure for the five-year programme is about \$686 million.

(2) In the process of transforming PPS, the LCSD will encourage and promote community participation and engagement by adopting different means, for example, workshops and opinion surveys to engage different stakeholders, such as students and parents of nearby schools, members of District Councils and relevant organisations, and invite them to offer opinions. Meanwhile, the LCSD will keep an open mind in organising open design competitions for the transformation works of some suitable PPS in order to collect the professionals' views and bring about innovation. The LCSD will look into the feasibility of the views with the works department. The LCSD will also take note of and consolidate the opinions collected, and incorporate feasible and suitable designs and facilities into the play spaces in an effort to provide more innovative, challenging and interesting play spaces.

(3) The LCSD and the works department will arrange tender exercises for the works fairly, openly and impartially. In vetting the tenders, special emphasis will be given to the innovativeness of the proposal and the potential of the proposed facilities in bringing benefits to local residents. Given that small and medium-sized enterprises and start-up companies can be rather innovative, eligible small and medium-sized enterprises, start-up companies and individuals or companies with less experience are welcome to participate in the transformation works for PPS.

[Hong Kong Customs alerts public on unsafe children's clothing](#)

Hong Kong Customs today (November 27) alerted members of the public to potential strangulation hazards posed by the cords of eight models of children's jackets (Annex).

Customs officers earlier conducted a spot check operation and test-bought children's jackets for safety testing. An examination by the Government Laboratory revealed that eight models of children's jackets violated the requirements of the relevant standard as the cords near the neck part of the jackets were found to pose a risk of strangulation.

Customs seized a total of 11 suspected unsafe children's jackets from four children's clothing retailers from November 7 to today. Prohibition notices were also served on the retailers concerned, prohibiting the continued sale of the children's jackets.

To avoid accidents, Customs reminds parents to watch out for potential hazards when selecting clothing for their children.

Customs is committed to the protection of consumer interests and regularly conducts spot checks and safety tests on consumer goods to ensure that they are reasonably safe for use by consumers.

Under the Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance, it is an offence to supply, manufacture or import consumer goods unless the goods comply with the general safety requirements for consumer goods. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$100,000 and imprisonment for one year on first conviction, and \$500,000 and imprisonment for two years on subsequent convictions.

Members of the public with information relating to unsafe consumer goods may report them via Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).