

Health Bureau responds to Hong Kong Dental Association on Elderly Health Care Voucher Greater Bay Area Pilot Scheme

Regarding the Hong Kong Dental Association's concern over the Elderly Health Care Voucher Greater Bay Area Pilot Scheme (Pilot Scheme), the Health Bureau (HHB) gave the following response today (February 21):

Since the launch of the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme at the University of Hong Kong-Shenzhen Hospital (HKU-SZH) by the Government in 2015, eligible elderly persons have been entitled to use Elderly Health Care Vouchers (EHCVs) to receive dental services at the HKU-SZH during the past eight years or so. The relevant arrangement also applies to the Huawei Li Zhi Yuan Community Health Service Center which was commissioned as an additional service point last year. To provide greater convenience to Hong Kong elderly persons, the Government rolled out the Pilot Scheme to extend the arrangement of using EHCVs for private primary healthcare services to medical institutions in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) in a bid to offer more options of service points to eligible Hong Kong elderly persons.

The Government attaches great importance to the service quality of the pilot medical institutions under the Pilot Scheme. To this end, the medical institutions (including the dental institutions) were selected for inclusion through a robust process. From last November to early February this year, the HHB and the Department of Health (DH) had conducted market research, sought opinions and recommendations from the Health Commission of Guangdong Province, and conducted site visits for direct inspection of facilities, equipment and operation of the medical institutions as well as meetings with relevant senior management to gain a thorough understanding of the institutions' management structures and models as well as operation. Having taken into account eight key factors including service quality, experience in management and operation as well as fee standards and level, the Government subsequently enlisted seven high-quality pilot medical institutions (including two dental institutions) under the Pilot Scheme.

To ensure the sustainability of high quality services at the pilot medical institutions, the Government is now working with various medical institutions (including the two dental institutions) on the follow-up arrangements. In particular, a training and service assurance mechanism will be established for the Pilot Scheme to cover various aspects such as service quality, training and operation, fee level, complaint mechanism and patients' experience.

A spokesman for the HHB stressed that the Pilot Scheme will be equipped

with a comprehensive and robust monitoring mechanism as for the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme (EHVS) being implemented in Hong Kong. The DH will keep a close watch under the training and service assurance mechanism. Members of the public may turn to the DH and the pilot medical institutions should they have any complaints regarding the Pilot Scheme in the future. The DH is keeping contact with the health authorities of the Mainland and will solicit their assistance when necessary.

The spokesman added that Hong Kong medical sector (including the dental profession) has been maintaining a high level of professionalism, with quite a number of the healthcare professionals enrolled in the EHVS. Hong Kong healthcare professionals are also seen to be practising in the GBA. At present, some 1500 dentists in Hong Kong have enrolled in the EHVS, providing services at over 3300 service points. Comparing with the few service points in the GBA, local dentists are still the most accessible channel for Hong Kong elderly persons to seek dental services. The Government hopes that the dental profession would proactively promote further developments of the profession and its service, and continue joining hands with the Government in pushing forward various initiatives for strengthening the city's dental services with a view to enhancing the overall oral health of citizens.