

Hospital Authority implements Chinese New Year special measures

The Hospital Authority (HA) announced today (February 8) that it will implement special measures to cope with the service demand surge during and after the Chinese New Year (CNY) holidays. Measures include strengthening general out-patient clinics (GOPCs) service, providing special sessions on Chinese medicine outpatient services, augmenting manpower in public hospitals and expediting hospital bed turnover. Meanwhile, there will be a special refund arrangement in accident and emergency (A&E) departments to facilitate patients considering to turn to other medical institutions for medical consultations and alleviating pressure on public hospitals.

The HA spokesperson said, "The number of GOPCs operating during the CNY holidays will be increased from 14 to 18, providing a total of 8 000 quotas which is about a 25 per cent increase compared with the public holidays in the past. Based on past experience, it is anticipated that more patients will need consultation service towards the end of public holidays, that is on the third and fourth day of CNY (February 12 and 13). The HA will closely monitor the service demand, mobilise manpower flexibly and gradually increase service capacity to match patient demand."

The list and service hours of the 18 GOPCs operating during the CNY holidays are set out in Annex I. Members of the public can make appointments of the next 24 hours through the telephone appointment system, or the Book GOPC function in the "HA Go" mobile application where necessary.

Moreover, Chinese Medicine Clinics cum Training and Research Centres (CMCTRs) located in the 18 districts will specially open to provide government-subsidised out-patient services during CNY, providing a total of 1 800 quotas. Patients may make an appointment either by telephone during service hours or through the "18 CM Clinics" mobile application (applicable to patients who have registered for 18 CMCTRs service). Please refer to Annex II for the CMCTRs list and their service hours, or refer to the most updated information on Chinese medicine services through the hyperlink: <https://cmk.ha.org.hk/zh-cht/services/notice/CNY2024/202402CNY>.

The HA will introduce a special refund arrangement in the A&E departments, starting from tomorrow (February 9) to the ninth day of CNY (February 18). If patients would like to turn to other medical institutions for consultations while they are waiting in A&E departments, they can apply for a refund of the A&E charges that have already been paid. This arrangement is only applicable to patients who have not been attended to by doctors, and the refund application must be made within 24 hours after registration. The refund will be received in approximately one month.

The HA spokesperson said, "Patient safety and their clinical situations remain the major concerns of healthcare staff, and we will not allow

patients, who have been clinically indicated to stay for further management, to go. The related arrangement is a special measure, aimed at alleviating the pressure on A&E departments during the CNY period, and allowing flexibility for patients with mild symptoms to seek alternative consultations."

The spokesperson appeals to non-urgent patients to avoid attending A&E departments. They are advised to attend GOPCs, CMCTRs, private doctors or 24-hour clinics of private hospitals as far as practicable. To choose a suitable family doctor and related clinic service, members of the public can browse the following online platform to search for information of private hospitals, medical institutions and general practitioners which will be open during public holidays: <https://www.map.gov.hk/gm/map/s/cnyclinic/all?lg=en>.

The spokesperson added, "Public hospitals will continue to strengthen manpower, open temporary beds and mobilise hospital beds flexibly, in order to expedite hospital bed turnover and cope with the service demand surge on A&E and in-patient services. At the same time, the community geriatric assessment team will provide tele-consultations to elderly people who are in need and living in residential care homes. The geriatric departments in public hospitals will also send staff to A&E departments, facilitating the assessment of elderly people for their medical needs. Moreover, the Auxiliary Medical Service will support the non-emergency ambulance transfer service in A&E departments."

Meanwhile, the HA appeals to members of the public to, during the celebration of the festival, stay vigilant to personal and environmental hygiene to avoid spreading disease. Members of the public should get vaccinated early for seasonal influenza and COVID-19, especially high-risk groups, to reduce the chance of getting infected for themselves and their family members, as well as to reduce critical cases and deaths. Members of the public may find details on the Centre for Health Protection COVID-19 Vaccination Programme website (www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/106934.html) and the Vaccination Schemes website (www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/17980.html).

The HA will continue to closely monitor the situation and flexibly deploy resources and manpower when necessary, and will keep increasing its service volume in order to provide appropriate service for patients.