

LCQ10: Hospital services in Kowloon Central Cluster

Following is a question by the Hon Starry Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (July 17):

Question:

It is learnt that the New Acute Hospital in Kai Tak (the New Acute Hospital) is expected to be completed in 2026, and will by then replace the Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH) as the leading hospital in the Kowloon Central Cluster (KCC), with most of the services at QEH to be gradually relocated to the New Acute Hospital. Under the "new for old" arrangement, no new general hospital is provided in the Cluster. On the other hand, it is learnt that while QEH is under KCC, its service recipients spread across the entire Kowloon (especially the Sham Shui Po District in the Kowloon West Cluster (KWC)) due to its prime geographical location and excellent transport accessibility. According to the information from the Hospital Authority, the elderly population in KCC and KWC has increased by about 40 per cent over the past 10 years, but the number of general beds has only increased by about 6.7% during the period, which has aroused concern as to whether relying on the New Acute Hospital alone can cope with the substantial increase in the elderly population. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as there are views that the arrangement for the gradual replacement of QEH by the New Acute Hospital in the provision of healthcare services will have significant impacts on the public, whether the authorities will draw up comprehensive publicity and promotion plans to enable the public to have an early grasp of the arrangement concerned; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it will consider redeveloping QEH into a major acute general hospital which provides 24-hour comprehensive healthcare services after the commissioning of the New Acute Hospital, so as to increase the overall healthcare service capacity of Kowloon; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will consider including in the second 10-year Hospital Development Plan the planning of an acute general hospital in KCC, so as to cope with the substantial increase in the elderly population and the huge demand for healthcare services in the Cluster; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Hospital Authority (HA), the reply to the question raised by the Hon Starry Lee is as follows:

(1) To dovetail with the implementation of the First Hospital Development Plan (HDP) by the HA, the services of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH) will be relocated to the New Acute Hospital at Kai Tak Development Area (NAH) gradually starting from early 2026. Since 2023, the Kowloon Central Cluster (KCC) has commenced to brief the general public on the works progress and basic information of NAH via various channels, such as community activities, seminars and newsletters.

With the topping out of the Specialist Out-patient Clinic Block and the Oncology Block of the NAH, the KCC will, starting from the third quarter of 2024, brief various stakeholders in phases the progress of works, as well as the positioning of NAH as an acute hospital and the service arrangements after commissioning. The KCC will also regularly report to relevant District Councils (DCs) in Kowloon and invite stakeholders, including Legislative Council Members, DC Members and patient groups, to visit the mock-up site of the NAH at a later stage to further brief them on the design and service arrangements of the NAH.

To facilitate thorough understanding of the operation of the NAH by various stakeholders in the community, and exchanges of views about the services of the NAH, the KCC will form a community liaison group starting from the fourth quarter of 2024 and invite representatives of respective District Offices, DC Members and various stakeholders of the community to join the group. The KCC will keep the community abreast of the works progress and service arrangements of the NAH through reporting in regular meetings of the community liaison group.

Besides, the KCC will also enhance the community and in-hospital publicity from the fourth quarter of 2024, through various public activities, exhibitions and seminars to facilitate the general public to acquire information and service arrangements of the NAH. Platforms such as social media and instant messaging groups will also be used to promote and broadcast relevant information of the NAH to the public. The HA has also established a thematic website for the NAH which provides details of the project, various facilities of the NAH and real-time images of the construction progress for the information of the general public.

As the commissioning of the NAH is approaching, the HA will announce the commencement dates of relevant services and the detailed arrangements of relocation and clinical services in a timely manner. Before the relocation, the clinical departments of the QEH will also provide relevant information, such as appointments and transportation arrangements, to the patients in detail. The KCC will continue to work closely with the media, DC Members, District Services and Community Care Teams and relevant government departments to publicise information about the relocation of the QEH and service arrangements of the NAH to the general public and deliver relevant information to the community and those in need.

(2) Upon the completion of the NAH, most of the clinical services of the QEH, including the accident and emergency (A&E) services, will be relocated to the NAH; while the Ambulatory Care Centre (Extension) of the QEH will remain at the King's Park site. Situated in Central Kowloon, the NAH will form a service network with the Our Lady of Maryknoll Hospital, Hong Kong Buddhist Hospital and Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Wong Tai Sin Hospital in the Kowloon City District; the Kwong Wah Hospital (KWH), Kowloon Hospital and other hospitals in the KCC; and the Ambulatory Care Centre (Extension) of the QEH to provide comprehensive healthcare services to the residents of the community. In view of the commissioning of the NAH, the Government will gradually enhance the public transport and pedestrian accessibility to the NAH to provide convenience to the public.

In fact, as far as the KCC is concerned, based on the population of nearly 1.15 million in its service area, the number of general beds per 1 000 people in the cluster is 4.5 (excluding beds in the Hong Kong Children's Hospital), which is comparatively higher than HA's overall number of 3.2 general beds per 1 000 persons in the whole of Hong Kong.

The Health Bureau (HHB) and the HA are reviewing the Second HDP by taking into account the future planning of Hong Kong (including the latest developments of the Northern Metropolis), anticipated population distribution and projected healthcare service demand. After the relocation of clinical services from the QEH to the NAH, there will be room for development of healthcare services at the King's Park site where the QEH is currently located. Given the convenient geographical location of the QEH, it will be a feasible option to consider the expansion of the ambulatory care services based on the demand of the population in Kowloon. In view of the overall distribution of the healthcare services in the Kowloon Region, and there will be additional 520 beds and 10 operating theatres (OT) upon completion of redevelopment of KWH, especially that the gross floor area (GFA) of the A&E department (including the emergency medicine (EM) ward) will be increased to about 6 500 square metres which is about thrice the area of the A&E department of KWH before, which could provide comprehensive A&E and inpatient services, therefore the priority of reprovisioning A&E services at the King's Park site will be relatively lower than other districts in Kowloon which currently do not have A&E services in the vicinity, such as the Wong Tai Sin district. The Government will consider the future use and development plan of the King's Park site in the course of reviewing the Second HDP.

(3) The HA plans and develops public healthcare services on a cluster basis, taking into account of a number of factors, including the overall planning of Hong Kong, the increase of service demand arising from population growth and demographic changes, rising prevalence of chronic diseases, technology advancement, manpower availability as well as the organisation of services of the clusters. The HA monitors the service utilisation and plans the public healthcare services according to the population projection parameters of various districts of Hong Kong and the development plans of the Government.

In view of the healthcare services demand of Kowloon, the HA is

implementing various hospital development projects in the three Kowloon clusters under the two HDPs to cope with the healthcare services demand in Kowloon. Apart from the 2 400 beds and 37 OT to be provided by the NAH, which are more than the existing about 2 010 beds and 24 OT in QEH, the area of the A&E department of NAH (including the EM ward) at about 13 400 square metres is about thrice the current area of that of QEH, there will also be a total of around additional 2 100 beds and 15 OT to be provided under the First HDP in the three Kowloon clusters, through the redevelopment of KWH, Our Lady of Maryknoll Hospital and Kwai Chung Hospital; and the expansion of United Christian Hospital, Haven of Hope Hospital and Lai King Building in Princess Margaret Hospital projects.

When planning A&E services, the HA will ensure that the A&E department is located within a reasonable distance from its catchment areas. In further planning the Second HDP, the HHB and the HA will continue to review the healthcare services development of the Kowloon Region, including the KCC. The Government's latest population statistics, projected service demand, and the clusters' healthcare service utilisation and demand will be considered during the process with a view to providing an optimal healthcare service model and facilities for meeting the long-term needs of the residents. Both the redevelopment or expansion of the existing hospitals in Kowloon and the construction of new hospitals subject to the availability of suitable sites are options that would be considered by the HHB and the HA to meet the demand.

After the completion of the review of the Second HDP, the Government will announce details of the hospital development projects, including those in the Kowloon Region, in due course.