

LCQ11: Special allowances for staff members of the Hospital Authority

Following is a question by Professor the Hon Joseph Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (June 10):

Question:

To cope with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic, Emergency Response Level was activated in public hospitals on January 25 this year. The Hospital Authority (HA) subsequently announced that staff members engaging in high risk duties in response to the epidemic might be granted Special Emergency Response Allowance (with retrospective effect from January 25), and that those staff members performing duties in high risk areas who needed to rent hotel rooms or temporary accommodation might be granted Special Rental Allowance. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows the eligibility criteria for receiving the aforesaid two allowances;

(2) whether it knows (a) the respective numbers of applications received, approved and rejected and (b) the respective amounts of expenses incurred, by HA in respect of the aforesaid two allowances in each month from January to May this year, with a tabulated breakdown by (i) hospital cluster, (ii) hospital, (iii) clinical department and (iv) grade;

(3) whether it knows if there is any channel for staff members whose applications for such allowances have been rejected to lodge an appeal; if there is, of the details; and

(4) as some HA staff members, who have retained their civil service status while working in HA, have indicated that they have not been disbursed such allowances so far, whether the Government knows the reasons for that and when they will be disbursed such allowances?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Hospital Authority (HA), I provide the following reply to the various parts of the question raised by Professor the Hon Joseph Lee.

The HA introduced a Special Emergency Response Allowance (SERA) arrangement on February 24, 2020 to provide staff engaging in high risk duties in response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic with SERA as appreciation and recognition. The SERA is granted to eligible full-

time staff as well as permanent or contract part-time staff who have performed at least two-week duty in high risk areas or surveillance wards since the activation of Emergency Response Level in public hospitals on January 25, 2020 (to be eligible, part-time staff should work on a full-day or whole-shift duty similar to that of their full-time counterparts). The SERA is payable to eligible employees for the days they have worked in high risk areas or surveillance wards, and is set at 20 per cent of the daily basic salary of the staff or at a rate of \$500 per day, whichever is higher. The SERA is granted with retrospective effect from January 25.

The HA also introduced a Special Rental Allowance (SRA) on February 1 for staff working in high risk areas or surveillance wards with temporary accommodation needs. Eligible permanent or contract full-time staff: (i) who have performed at least two-week duty in high risk areas or surveillance wards, or (ii) whose only residency is in the Mainland; and not provided with suitable temporary accommodation by the HA or choosing not to use the accommodation provided with justifications and detailed records, may apply for the SRA, which is set at a fixed rate of \$500 per day.

The expenditure and number of claims for the allowances as at May 2020 are set out in the table below:

Cluster/ Head Office	SERA		SRA	
	Total expenditure (\$ million)	Number of claims	Total expenditure (\$ million)	Number of claims
Hong Kong East Cluster	21.6	3 270	6.2	645
Hong Kong West Cluster	11.1	1 738	4.6	553
Kowloon Central Cluster	31.0	4 779	13.9	1 371
Kowloon East Cluster	26.3	3 949	13.1	1 441
Kowloon West Cluster	40.0	5 135	12.2	1 283
New Territories East Cluster	31.5	5 370	10.1	1 030
New Territories West Cluster	34.6	5 945	9.8	1 022
Head Office*	0.1	13	0.1	6
Total	196.2	30 199	70.0	7 351

* The staff concerned have performed duties in high risk areas of cluster hospitals or worked in the HA's COVID-19 support team.

The HA does not maintain the number of unsuccessful applications for the SERA and the SRA. Staff may approach their division head or cluster human resources office/hospital human resources department for enquiries or other views regarding their application results.

Regarding civil servants working in the HA, the Government has granted permission for those engaging in high risk duties to receive the two special allowances. The Department of Health has notified the staff concerned via the HA and put the arrangement into effect. As with the staff of the HA, the SERA and the SRA are granted with retrospective effect from January 25 and February 1, 2020 respectively.