

LCQ13: Assisting the deaf/hard-of-hearing residents in residential care homes for the elderly

Following is a question by the Hon Leung Yiu-chung and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (June 13):

Question:

It is learnt that there are currently more than 150 000 deaf/hard-of-hearing persons in Hong Kong and over 80 per cent of them are elderly persons (i.e. persons aged 60 or above). At present, a majority of residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) have not put in place a policy which is friendly towards the deaf/hard-of-hearing elderly persons (such as providing sign language training to their staff, providing auditory training to their residents and installing fire alarm lights), making it difficult for the deaf/hard-of-hearing elderly persons to integrate themselves into the environment in RCHEs and to seek assistance when necessary. Some members of the public have pointed out that as the population of Hong Kong is ageing and most people's hearing will deteriorate with age, the Government should provide RCHEs dedicated for the deaf/hard-of-hearing elderly persons. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it knows the number of deaf/hard-of-hearing residents in RCHEs in each of the past five years;
- (2) whether it knows the number of RCHE staff members across the territory in each of the past five years who knew sign language, with a breakdown by type of RCHEs (i.e. subvented homes, contract homes, non-profit-making self-financing homes and private homes) in which they worked;
- (3) whether it has implemented a policy under which arrangements are made for the deaf/hard-of-hearing elderly persons to reside centrally in RCHEs with facilities and services that are friendly to the deaf/hard-of-hearing elderly persons; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that, and whether it will implement such a policy and set up such type of RCHEs;
- (4) whether it has put in place a policy to assist the deaf/hard-of-hearing residents in RCHEs in improving their social life; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that, and whether it will implement such a policy; and
- (5) as some deaf/hard-of-hearing residents in RCHEs have relayed that because they are unable to communicate with those RCHE staff who do not know sign language, they cannot obtain the necessary assistance immediately when they feel unwell and have urgent needs, whether the authorities have put in place a policy to assist such residents, including providing sign language training to RCHE staff; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will implement such

a policy?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) The Social Welfare Department (SWD) does not have information on the number of elderly persons with hearing impairment residing in residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs).

(2) SWD does not have information on the number of RCHE staff who know sign language.

(3)&(4) SWD has since 2003 implemented the Central Waiting List mechanism to collectively process applications from elderly persons for subsidised long-term care services and service matching. Applicants have to be assessed under the Standardised Care Need Assessment Mechanism for Elderly Services, and the accredited assessors adopt an internationally recognised assessment tool known as "Minimum Data Set – Home Care" to comprehensively assess the impairment level in the elderly persons' abilities to take care of themselves, physical functioning, memory and communication skills, behaviour and emotion, etc., as well as their health conditions, the environmental risk they may face and whether they could cope with these issues in their daily lives, with a view to identifying their care needs and matching them with appropriate services.

Hearing is one of the factors in assessing the communication skills of elderly persons. After elderly persons have been allocated an RCHE placement, SWD will forward the assessment results to the RCHEs concerned so as to facilitate their professional teams to formulate appropriate individual care plans and provide appropriate support and counselling services for those in need. Representatives of the RCHEs will also meet with the elderly persons before admission to further understand their care needs and enhance their individual care plans.

At present, SWD provides subsidised residential care services for the elderly under an integrated approach, thereby enabling elderly persons of different physical conditions to receive continuous care. The facilities of subvented and contract RCHEs (e.g. hearing aids) can cater for the care needs of elderly persons with hearing impairment. Separately, elderly persons receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (including those residing in RCHEs) may, subject to medical recommendation, apply for special grants to cover the costs for purchasing the necessary assistive devices (including hearing aids).

(5) According to the prevailing requirements, an RCHE shall be provided with a fire detection system and a fire alarm system; and apart from audio warning devices, visual alarm signals shall be installed to form part of the fire alarm system. Besides, an RCHE shall install a call bell at the bedspace of each resident requiring a high level of care, as well as in toilet cubicles

and bathrooms, for residents to seek assistance immediately when necessary.

SWD has all along provided RCHE staff with training courses on taking care of elderly persons with special needs. SWD is planning to organise in 2018-19 a training course for RCHE staff on taking care of residents with hearing impairment, with a view to enhancing their awareness and skills in this aspect.