

LCQ17: Encouraging blood donation by members of public

Following is a question by Reverend Canon the Hon Peter Douglas Koon and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (June 19):

Question:

In August last year, the Secretary for Health said that the Hong Kong Red Cross Blood Transfusion Service would need to collect 650 units of blood daily in order to provide sufficient blood to all hospitals across the territory for patients' use. On encouraging blood donation by members of the public, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will follow the practices of other countries where governments offer funds to collaborate with organisations for the provision of non-cash and material rewards to blood donors, including giving away daily necessities, supermarket coupons, etc., in order to increase the incentives for members of the public to donate blood; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it will, by making reference to the practices of some countries (e.g. Australia and Italy), introduce a "blood donation holiday" to allow employees to spare time to donate blood during working hours while enjoying the protection of full pay and other labour rights and interests in order to reduce the opportunity cost of blood donation on the part of employees and increase their incentives to donate blood; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether it will consider the use of mobile phone SMS messages or WhatsApp alerts to invite regular and deferred blood donors to donate blood again; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) whether it will consider adjusting or extending the operating hours of donor centres to allow sufficient time for members of the public and employees to donate blood after work; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) as there are only 10 donor centres operating at fixed hours and fixed locations currently, whether it knows if the Hong Kong Red Cross will consider setting up a new donor centre in each of the 18 districts across the territory; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Hong Kong Red Cross Blood Transfusion Service (BTS) began to promote voluntary blood donation in Hong Kong since 1952. Under the management of

the Hospital Authority (HA) since 1991, the BTS provides blood to all hospitals in Hong Kong for use by patients, and continues to be the only institution supplying blood in Hong Kong.

There is no substitute for blood, and the shelf life of blood is limited. Therefore, it is of particular importance for citizens to donate blood voluntarily and benevolently on a regular basis, so that a timely supply of blood of assured safety and quality can be secured for patients in need of rescue. The Government will continue to lend its full support to the work of the BTS and call on members of the public, enterprises and organisations to actively participate in blood donation drives, thereby giving the hospitals a stable and safe blood supply for clinical transfusion and treatment purposes.

In consultation with the HA, the consolidated reply to the question raised by Reverend Canon the Hon Peter Douglas Koon is as follows:

(1) While blood donation is a voluntary and non-remunerated act for the public good, in order to encourage and express gratitude to members of the public for blood donation, the BTS has introduced a range of medals and certificates to commend supportive donors who have participated in blood donation drives. During special festivities and holidays, such as the Chinese New Year, Valentine's Day, Easter, summer holidays and Christmas, the BTS also presents souvenirs to those who donate blood to save lives during these festive occasions as a token of appreciation and to encourage the public to actively participate in blood donation. In recent years, the BTS has designed a variety of practical souvenirs based on the mascot "Captain Blood", which have been well received by the public. Moreover, the BTS will launch a blood donation reward scheme, whereby blood donors can earn points by donating blood and redeem them for different rewards through its mobile application "HK Blood". At the same time, the BTS also plans to collaborate with various enterprises and organisations through the reward platform, so as to join hands with different sectors of the community to promote blood donation.

(2) Blood donation is a voluntary act for the public good. The BTS actively encourages private enterprises to arrange for their employees to participate in blood donation drives during working hours when mobile blood donation teams or blood donation vehicles visit; or to organise group blood donation drives by visiting the donor centres, as a kind of staff team building activity for small and medium-sized enterprises as well as large enterprises. At present, quite a number of supportive enterprises have taken the initiative to introduce half-day paid leave for blood donation; or recognise blood donation as a form of voluntary work of participating in social welfare activities, so that their employees can apply for the corresponding volunteer leave. The BTS will continue to take forward the relevant publicity work.

As for the public sector, various government departments also organise blood donation drives on a regular basis, including the one held just last week at the Central Government Offices, which offer convenience for government personnel to donate blood during normal office hours to help patients in need of blood transfusions.

(3) In order to enhance the communication between the BTS and blood donors, and to express gratitude to blood donors for their selfless contributions, the BTS has rolled out the "BloodTHX" Short Message Service (SMS) in October 2023 to send thank-you messages to blood donors. When the donated whole blood has been processed, tested and distributed to various hospitals, blood donors will receive messages of appreciation from the "BloodTHX" SMS account of the BTS and will also be notified that the donated blood has reached hospitals for use by patients, thus enabling blood donors to better appreciate the significance of the message of "giving blood to save lives". At present, the "BloodTHX" SMS has been gradually extended to cover donors of apheresis donation. Besides, the BTS has also made extensive use of SMS and mobile application to disseminate messages to invite donors who are suitable or eligible to come forward to donate blood again, so as to stabilise the supply at the blood bank. In addition, the BTS has continued to develop more communication channels to strengthen ties with blood donors and the general public. This includes the setting up of "Blood for Life" WhatsApp channel in December 2023 to provide the latest blood donation information and to maintain communication with people from all walks of life, in particular the younger generation.

(4) and (5) The majority of blood donor centres under the BTS are open until 7pm every day to facilitate blood donation by the public. Meanwhile, the BTS has set up mobile blood donation teams and mobile blood donation vehicles to visit the 18 districts in the city to facilitate government departments, enterprises, organisations and the academia to arrange different types of blood donation drives. In addition, the BTS actively works in concerted efforts with the Government. With the support of the Health Bureau and the Government Property Agency, the BTS has established a blood donation centre at the Immigration Tower in Wan Chai in 2021 and a new blood donation centre will be set up in the newly constructed joint-user complex in Tseung Kwan O. The BTS also sets up temporary blood donation points in various districts from time to time to encourage the general public to join the league of blood donors and to promote the message of "giving blood to save lives" on all fronts in the community.