

LCQ17: Private healthcare services at shopping centres of public housing estates

Following is a question by the Hon Joephy Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Housing, Ms Winnie Ho, in the Legislative Council today (January 22):

Question:

Some members of the local community have relayed that the number of private medical clinics in the shopping centres of public housing estates (PHEs) under the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) and in the nearby shopping malls has decreased significantly in recent years, and there is not even a single western medicine practitioner in some of the shopping centres of PHEs (e.g. Cheung Shan Estate, On Yam Estate and Choi Hung Estate which will soon be redeveloped), resulting in local residents having to seek medical treatment in other districts or concentrating on the remaining few private medical clinics for treatment, thus increasing the waiting time and causing great inconvenience. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has compiled statistics on (i) the number of private general medical clinics in the shopping centres of PHEs under HA and in divested shopping centres of PHEs under HA, and (ii) the respective numbers of such clinics providing evening consultation services in the past five years, with a tabulated breakdown by shopping centre;

(2) whether it has compiled statistics on the following information of the shopping centres in PHEs under HA (including divested shopping centres) in which "zero" private general medical clinic was found in the past five years: names of the shopping centres, years of occurrence and the duration of each occurrence; and

(3) whether HA has formulated policies or indicators to regularly review and assess the demand for and supply of private medical clinic services in the shopping centres of PHEs (including divested shopping centres), and to take proactive measures to increase the number of such clinics as necessary, so as to ensure that the residents can have access to adequate and convenient private healthcare services; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The consolidated reply of the Housing Bureau and the Health Bureau to

the question raised by the Hon JoePHY Chan is as follows:

(1) and (2) The primary function of the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) is to provide affordable rental housing to low-income families with housing needs. At the same time, the HA also provides various ancillary facilities, such as retail facilities in which the medical clinic is included in the trade mix, in its public housing estates (PHEs) to cater for the daily needs of residents.

Currently, there are a total of 61 medical clinics situated in 55 shopping centres under the HA, with about 80 per cent of the HA's shopping centres furnished with at least one medical clinic. Additionally, tendering exercises for 5 clinic premises located in different shopping centres are underway. Together with the 16 medical clinics located in other commercial premises of the HA's PHEs, there are a total of 77 medical clinics under the retail facilities of the HA, providing medical consultation services to residents at their convenience. These medical clinics determine their opening hours for consultation services based on factors such as individual circumstances and residents' demand for medical services. The HA does not request these clinics to provide evening medical consultation services. The shopping centres in the HA's PHEs with medical clinics available in the past five years are set out at Annex. As regards the non-domestic properties divested by the HA, the owners of the divested properties are governed by laws, conditions of land leases, Deed of Mutual Covenant and the relevant restrictive covenants in the assignment deeds. The HA does not interfere with the daily operation and commercial decisions of the owners concerned, nor does it compile statistics on the type of shops in the shopping centres of divested properties.

(3) The HA has all along been letting out its commercial premises according to business principles. In general, commercial premises are let out through invitation of tenders, and the rental amount is assessed based on the prevailing market value. The HA understands the demand of residents for medical consultation services. Therefore, in arranging the letting of commercial premises, the HA gives priority to the trade of medical clinics. The HA has also set up a hotline to provide leasing information on its commercial premises, so that interested potential tenants may contact the HA directly. Besides, QR codes are added onto leasing posters to facilitate potential tenants in browsing the latest tender notices and subscribing to tender information related to commercial premises, thereby enabling the setting up of more medical clinics in PHEs.

When the HA invites tenders for vacant shops, apart from putting up leasing posters outside the shops, placing tender advertisements on newspapers and uploading tender notices onto the websites of the HA/Housing Department, the HA also takes the initiative to contact potential tenants who have submitted bids for the same trade (including medical clinics) but in vain. In addition, the HA informs the Hong Kong Doctors Union and the Hong Kong Medical Association by email and post of the shops available for tender, so that they may relay the message to their doctor members who are interested in bidding for the shops. This will in turn increase the chance of successful

letting of commercial premises as medical clinics. According to our record, the number of medical clinics in the HA's retail facilities increased by around seven per cent from 2020 to 2024, with a total of 77 medical clinics available (provided in commercial premises in shopping centres or not). Whether the premises will be let out for the purpose of medical clinics is however a business decision made by the service provider after taking into consideration various factors such as the location, operating cost and target clients of a clinic.

In planning and developing the overall primary healthcare services, the Health Bureau takes into account a number of factors, including the delivery model of primary healthcare services, demographic changes and distribution of service targets, the provision and needs of both public and private primary healthcare services in the districts, etc. Therefore, the distribution of private doctors and primary healthcare service providers varies across districts. In accordance with the Primary Healthcare Blueprint (Blueprint), the Government has been reserving sites in different districts for the long-term development of primary healthcare services, exploring how to plan and develop healthcare service facilities more effectively, as well as enhancing co-ordination of development and redevelopment of government buildings and premises of healthcare facilities in the community, including re-provisioning, expanding or consolidating the existing healthcare facilities under the principle of optimising land use. The Government will also consider various measures, such as examining the feasibility of providing accommodation space therein for non-governmental organisations or private healthcare service providers to provide primary healthcare services as set out in the Blueprint, so as to promote the inclusion of private or non-governmental organisation healthcare service providers in the district-based community healthcare system.