

## LCQ19: Non-emergency ambulance transfer service

Following is a question by the Hon Mrs Regina Ip and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (September 15):

Question:

At present, non-emergency ambulance transfer service (NEATS) (including inter-hospital patient transfer) is provided by the Hong Kong Fire Services Department (FSD), the Hospital Authority (HA) and the Auxiliary Medical Service. Some members of the public have pointed out that as NEATS is provided solely by the FSD after 12 o'clock on each night, the provision of emergency ambulance service by the FSD during small hours may be affected, and the situations of ambulance depots with only a few ambulances stationed (e.g. Tung Chung Ambulance Depot with only three stationing ambulances at night) have particularly aroused concerns. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the current number of ambulances stationing at each FSD ambulance depot and, among them, the number of those used for the provision of NEATS;
- (2) of the number of service calls attended by the ambulances stationing at each FSD ambulance depot and, among such calls, the number and percentage of those for the provision of NEATS, in each of the past three years; and
- (3) whether it will request the HA to provide round-the-clock NEATS so that the FSD's resources for emergency ambulance service will not be thinned out; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Security Bureau and the Hospital Authority (HA), my reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Mrs Regina Ip is as follows:

The HA's non-emergency ambulance transfer service (NEATS) is provided by the HA. The ambulances of the Hong Kong Fire Services Department (FSD) are not used for providing NEATS. The FSD is mainly responsible for providing "emergency calls" and "hospital transfer calls" ambulance service.

NEATS of the HA

NEATS of the HA aims to provide safe and efficient transfer service for clinically stable patients, and prioritise discharge and transfer to another

hospital for patients. The scope of service is mainly to provide point-to-point transfer service (i.e. home to and from the hospital or specialist clinic) for discharged patients, Geriatric Day Hospitals patients and specialist outpatients. The service targets are patients with mobility-handicapped, mentally or sensorily impaired who are unable to use other means of transportation (including public transportation, old age home vehicle, Rehabus and taxi). Patients who request the service must comply with the established standards and guidelines of the HA. These patients include stretcher-bound, wheelchair-bound (residence not accessible by lift), elderly who live alone and mobility-handicapped relying on walking aid, mentally or sensorily impaired (e.g. visually impaired) and not assisted by family and friends upon discharge, etc.

Patients who wish to use the service can make a request through medical staff of the attending clinic or hospital. As long as a patient meets the relevant criteria, medical staff will make an appointment for the patient's next non-emergency service through the appointment system when arranging the date and time of the next follow-up consultation. At present, NEATS of the HA are managed by individual clusters. The service hours are generally from 8am to 9pm, depending on the service need.

#### Emergency ambulance service of the FSD

"Emergency calls" of the FSD includes (1) calls from the public, requesting conveyance of patients and casualties from scene of incidents to hospitals for emergency treatment; and (2) calls from hospitals or medical institutions, requesting transfer of patients and casualties assessed by medical personnel as emergent from a hospital or medical institution to another acute hospital or medical institution for emergency treatment or examination. In respect of "hospital transfer calls", the FSD transfers patients and casualties assessed by medical personnel from a hospital or medical institution to another hospital or medical institution for urgent treatment or examination. The FSD also provides "non-emergency calls" ambulance service in outlying islands. The numbers of ambulances stationing at ambulance depots of the FSD are at Annex 1. The number of "emergency calls", "hospital transfer calls" and "non-emergency calls" in Hong Kong and Islands, Kowloon and the New Territories in 2018 to 2020 are at Annex 2.

Since patients who use NEATS do not require transfer out of service hours and the vehicles used to provide such service do not belong to the FSD, hence they will not create the issue of affecting ambulance service of the FSD. The HA and the FSD will continue to make appropriate arrangements for NEATS and "hospital transfer calls" respectively according to actual situation and resources allocation, and maintain close communication and liaison with each other.