

LCQ4: Organ donation and transplants

Following is a question by the Hon Martin Liao and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (December 4):

Question:

The number of cases of organ donation recorded in Hong Kong for the first half of this year was on the low side and it has been reported that the number of transplants performed this year so far has plunged when compared with that of the same period of last year. Such situation has aroused concerns. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the monthly statistics of Hong Kong on organ donation, patients on the waiting list, organ transplants performed and average waiting time of patients for each type of organs in the past two years and since January this year;

(2) as the latest Thematic Household Survey Report has projected that more than 1.5 million of adults are willing to donate their organs after death, yet the number of persons who have registered with the Centralised Organ Donation Register is only about 310 000, whether the Government knows the reasons why a lot of people who are willing to donate their organs still have not yet registered, and the targeted measures in place to encourage such people to turn their goodwill into action, so as to practically boost the registration rate for organ donation; and

(3) as it has been reported that as at the end of last year, more than 300 Hong Kong people were waiting to undergo transplant of donated organs on the Mainland, and in future, Hong Kong residents may have the opportunity to undergo organ transplants at the University of Hong Kong-Shenzhen Hospital, whether the Government knows the relevant details and has taken follow-up actions; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

To impress upon the general public the importance of organ donation and to gradually inculcate a culture that is receptive to and appreciative of organ donation, the Food and Health Bureau, together with the Department of Health (DH) and the Hospital Authority (HA), have been making promotional efforts on different fronts in collaboration with community partners. Besides, the Government has been keeping track of the development regarding the public attitude and perception towards organ donation in order to facilitate the review of organ donation policy and promotional strategy.

My reply to the three parts of the question raised by the Hon Martin

Liao is as follows:

(1) In Hong Kong, human organs used for transplant originated from either living or cadaveric organ donation. Although some patients with organ failure can receive living donation, cadaveric organs are the main source of human organs for transplant.

HA does not maintain monthly statistics on organ donation, patients on the waiting list, organ transplants performed and average waiting time of patients for each type of organs. The annual statistics for the period from 2017 to 2019 (as at end of September) are in Annex.

(2) The DH launched the Centralised Organ Donation Register (CODR) in 2008 to provide members of the public with a convenient channel to register their wish to donate organs after death. The CODR also provides a reliable and effective means for HA's Organ Donation Coordinators to ascertain, upon patients' death, their previously expressed wish to donate organs, so that they may approach the patients' families as soon as possible to seek their consent for donation of the deceased's organs in order to save patients in urgent need of organ transplant. As at November 2019, over 310 000 registrations have been recorded in the CODR. On the other hand, the latest Thematic Household Survey (THS) has projected that more than 1.5 million people are willing to donate their organs after death, reflecting that most people have yet to turn their beliefs into actions. According to the THS, among those people who were willing to donate organs after death but had not registered in the CODR, the majority considered there was no urgent need to register, or they were too busy/had no time to do so. Less than 10 per cent expressed that they did not know the registration procedure.

Over the years, we have been committed to making promotional efforts on organ donation on different fronts with a view to gradually inculcating a culture that is receptive to and appreciative of organ donation and increasing the registration number of the CODR. The Government has set up the Committee on Promotion of Organ Donation (CPOD) in April 2016 to formulate organ donation promotion strategy and direction, and co-ordinate the work by other partners in conducting organ donation promotional activities and programmes, as well as public education. In line with the CPOD's recommendations, DH continues to organise promotional activities and seminars on organ donation targeting at different groups and ages, promote organ donation on television, radio, the Internet and other media, as well as conduct various organ donation promotional activities and programmes jointly with the Organ Donation Promotion Charter signatories etc.

To facilitate registration by members of the public, the Government will continue to promote the CODR in more locations and through different channels. To tie in with the celebration of the Organ Donation Day in November every year, we had encouraged public registration in the CODR by setting up promotion booths at MTR stations and arranging promotional bus parades. This year, we have arranged an organ donation promotion vehicle to various locations from November to December in order to raise the public's awareness on organ donation and facilitate organ donation registration. The

DH also sets up organ donation promotion booths to reach out to the public at various large scale public events, such as the Hong Kong Brands and Products Expo and Hong Kong Book Fair etc. In addition, since early 2019, the DH has visited different Smart Identity Card Replacement Centres of the Immigration Department on rotation to call for support from the general public on organ donation and assist them to register in the CODR. To date, about 9 000 people have registered.

Besides, the DH has actively established an institution-based network by inviting public bodies, private companies and NGOs to work in collaboration with the Government to promote organ donation in order to boost the registration number of the CODR. The DH also makes use of technological platforms to facilitate public registration of organ donation. QR code allows members of the public to register online by using mobile phones at any time. Meanwhile, the homepage of the HA's website also contains relevant links to facilitate the public to register online immediately.

(3) Due to personal reasons, some individuals may choose to receive organ transplantation through the organ allocation mechanism on the Mainland. The registration procedures, organ allocation mechanism and transplantation surgeries are performed in accordance with the regulations of the Mainland. We understand that the University of Hong Kong-Shenzhen Hospital had made some preliminary proposals to turn itself into a co-ordination unit for performing transplantation surgery for Hong Kong residents awaiting organ transplant on the Mainland. However, it is necessary for such proposal to comply with relevant Mainland laws, regulations and procedures, and acquire approval and facilitation by the Mainland authorities.

It would be beyond the legal authority of the HA to set up a mechanism to allow patients awaiting organs in Hong Kong to receive transplantation outside the territory, just as the purchase of transplantation services from overseas service providers by the HA for its patients. From implementation perspective, it is also difficult to delineate the legal responsibilities between HA and individual clinical service providers.

All in all, we will closely monitor the development of organ transplant and continue our efforts to promote organ donation to assist patients in need.