

LCQ4: Promoting development of Chinese medicine

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Han-pan and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (May 25):

Question:

The Chief Executive indicated in the 2018 Policy Address that Chinese medicine would be incorporated into the healthcare system in Hong Kong. However, there are views pointing out that there are currently only 10-odd Chinese Medicine Clinics cum Training and Research Centres in Hong Kong providing government-subsidised Chinese medicine out-patient services, and the Hospital Authority has not seen to actively integrate Chinese medicine into the healthcare system. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether specific measures are in place to expedite the popularisation of Chinese medicine, including drawing reference from the practice of the Mainland to improve the legislation on and the system of Chinese medicine, establishing a Chinese Medicine Authority, introducing medical professional liability protection for Chinese medicine, and strengthening Chinese and Western medicine collaboration and the patient referral work in public hospitals;

(2) as it has been reported that the leader of the Mainland Chinese medicine expert group of the Central Authorities suggested earlier on that Hong Kong should build up the strength of the Chinese medicine departments and improve the Chinese medicine management institutions to cope with large-scale epidemic outbreaks, whether the Government will consider formulating relevant policies to strengthen the role of the Chinese medicine sector in the anti-epidemic work; and

(3) whether it will consider discussing with the Mainland the setting up of a mutual recognition system for registration of proprietary Chinese medicines (pCms), so as to promote the flow of pCms between the Mainland and Hong Kong?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Chan Han-pan is as follows:

The Government has all along been promoting the development of Chinese medicine (CM) in Hong Kong. Further to the re-affirming of the positioning of CM in Hong Kong's development of healthcare system in the 2018 Policy

Address, we have been working on various fronts in a progressive manner.

As regards CM services, we have incorporated CM into the healthcare system through the Government subsidising defined CM services, which include three areas. Firstly, the 18 Chinese Medicine Clinics cum Training and Research Centres (CMCTRs), which operate on a tripartite collaboration model, have been providing government-subsidised out-patient services since 2020, while continuing to provide a variety of CM service choices to the public.

Secondly, to help gather experiences in the operation of integrated Chinese-Western medicine (ICWM) and CM in-patient services, the Hospital Authority (HA) has been providing government-subsidised ICWM treatment services to HA in-patients of selected disease areas. With our efforts in actively pressing ahead with the development of the services concerned, such services are currently provided at eight public hospitals, covering all seven hospital clusters. The HA will continue to explore enhancing the services concerned by increasing the number of participating hospitals and selected diseases areas, as well as exploring the regularisation of the services concerned.

Thirdly, the construction work and preparatory work for commissioning of Hong Kong's first Chinese Medicine Hospital (CMH) has already been launched, with a view to commencing the provision of government-subsidised in-patient and out-patient services by phases starting from mid-2025. The CMH will also establish a collaboration platform with service providers including the CMCTRs, to strengthen collaboration in various areas such as service development, patient circulation and referral.

The aforementioned three components are complementary in terms of service scope, which will provide a comprehensive network for the delivery of government-subsidised CM services. The Government will continue to allocate more resources to promote the development of CM services.

Meanwhile, with the support of the Central Government and the Guangdong Provincial Government, we have been actively strengthening Hong Kong's role under the blueprint set out in the Construction Plan for the Chinese Medicine Highlands in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (2020-2025). Among others, Mainland public CM healthcare institutions, as pilot sites, started to recruit Hong Kong Chinese medicine practitioners (CMPs) in 2021, enabling them to further their practice within the national healthcare system and nurturing more clinical talents for Hong Kong. As regards registration of proprietary Chinese medicines (pCms), Hong Kong registered traditional pCms for external use currently could be registered and sold in the Mainland through the streamlined procedures, enabling Hong Kong pCm manufacturers to expand their markets as well as creating favourable conditions for Hong Kong pCms to "go global" in the long run.

Regarding legislation and administrative structure, the prevailing Chinese Medicine Ordinance (Ordinance) has already provided the regulatory measures in relation to CM practice and CM drugs. The Chinese Medicine Regulatory Office of the Department of Health is mainly responsible for implementing the regulatory matters under the Ordinance and providing support

to the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong. Over the years, the Government has been reviewing the prevailing legislative provisions and its implementation from time to time, making amendments as necessary. The Chinese Medicine Unit has been established under the Food and Health Bureau since 2018 to co-ordinate and promote the development of CM in Hong Kong at the policy level. The Chinese Medicine Development Fund (CMDF) was also officially launched in mid-2019 to provide financial subsidies to the CM sector to promote talent nurturing, research and publicity, in order to generate impetus for CM development in Hong Kong on all fronts.

During the COVID-19 epidemic, CM has played an important role through in-depth participation in the whole process of epidemic prevention, treatment and rehabilitation. On prevention, the CM sector has been promoting anti-epidemic knowledge to the public through different means. To fully support the CM sector, the CMDF has expedited the handling and accorded priority to the vetting of subsidy items in relation to anti-epidemic work.

CM has also played an instrumental role in the multi-tiered triage system. The HA has been implementing the Special CM Programme for COVID-19 In-patients since 2021 to allow ICWM to give full play to its strengths in anti-epidemic treatment. Meanwhile, the Government has also been stepping up the use of CM in various establishments such as community isolation facilities, holding centres and residential care homes for the elderly, as well as offering CM support to persons under isolation/quarantine and the general public through providing consultation and advice services, distributing anti-epidemic pCms, etc. The Government has also co-ordinated the CM sector to mobilise its resources to take forward various work, including launching the "Fight the Virus Together – Chinese Medicine Telemedicine Scheme" through the CMDF to subsidise CMPs to provide free-of-charge telemedicine services as well as dispensing and delivery of CM drugs.

CM has clear advantages in rehabilitation. The HA launched in 2020 the Special CM Out-patient Programme to provide free-of-charge CM rehabilitation services to patients who have been discharged from hospitals and persons who have completed isolation at the CMCTRs.

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has been grateful to the Central Authorities for sending the Mainland CM expert group to provide guidance during the fifth wave of the epidemic. During its visit, the expert group gained thorough understanding on the actual application of CM in Hong Kong's anti-epidemic work, and provided valuable feedback to further enhancing Hong Kong's CM anti-epidemic capabilities.

The Government will, on the basis of the recommendations put forth by the CM expert group, closely collaborate with stakeholders of the CM sector to further widen the use and application of CM in Hong Kong, with a view to promoting the long-term development of CM in Hong Kong.