

LCQ5: Public dental services

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (May 29):

Question:

Currently, among the dental clinics under the Department of Health, 11 of them provide the public with free emergency dental treatment (commonly known as "general public dental session" (GP dental session)). The service includes pain relief and teeth extraction only but not other dental treatment. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the consultation quota and attendance of the GP dental sessions provided by each of the 11 aforesaid dental clinics in the last financial year;

(2) whether it will consider afresh expanding the scope of the GP dental session to cover fillings and dentures; and

(3) given that Tung Chung Dental Clinic currently provides dental treatment to civil servants or their dependants only, and ordinary residents in Tung Chung need to travel a long distance to Tsuen Wan Dental Clinic in order to attend the GP dental sessions, whether the Government will consider making arrangements for Tung Chung Dental Clinic to set aside time slots for providing GP dental sessions for ordinary residents in Tung Chung?

Reply:

President,

The Government's current policy on dental services aims to raise public awareness of oral health and encourage the public to develop proper oral health habits through promotion and education. Curative dental care services are mainly provided by the private sector and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Over the years, the Oral Health Education Unit of the Department of Health (DH) has implemented oral health promotion programmes targeting different age groups and disseminated oral health information through various channels to enhance oral health of the community. Apart from making efforts to promote oral health and prevent oral problems, the Government also provides emergency dental services for the public and special oral care services for in-patients and persons with special oral healthcare needs.

Government dental clinics are mainly responsible for providing dental benefits for civil servants/pensioners and their eligible dependents as required of the Government as terms of employment for civil servants, and therefore civil servants/pensioners and their eligible dependents are the major service targets of these clinics. Nonetheless, the Government provides

free emergency dental treatments for the public through designated sessions (i.e. general public sessions) in 11 government dental clinics of the DH.

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Holden Chow is as follows:

(1) The consultation quota and attendance of general public sessions provided by each of the 11 government dental clinics in 2018-19 are set out in Annex.

(2) and (3) As providing comprehensive dental services for the public would require substantial amount of financial resources, it is necessary for the Government to focus resources on providing emergency dental services for the public. At present, free emergency dental services are provided for the public through general public sessions in the 11 government dental clinics of the DH. These services mainly cover emergency dental treatments, including treatment of acute dental diseases, prescription for pain relief, treatment of oral abscess and teeth extraction. Professional advice is also given by dentists to patients with regard to their individual needs. In addition, the DH provides specialist treatments in the Oral Maxillofacial Surgery and Dental Units of seven public hospitals for referred patients. The Hospital Authority also provides dental services in four public hospitals for referred in-patients, patients with special oral healthcare needs and patients with dental emergency needs. As for curative dental care services, they are mainly provided by the private sector and NGOs.

Currently, government dental clinics are operating at their full capacity, with a usage rate of almost 100 per cent for all appointment time slots. It is therefore not possible for the DH to allocate more time slots for general public sessions on top of the existing service provided at government dental clinics, including Tung Chung Dental Clinic.

Apart from general public sessions, there are also other measures to take care of persons with special needs, including the School Dental Care Service for primary school students, and dental care support for the low-income elderly with special needs, such as the Outreach Dental Care Programme for the Elderly and Community Care Fund Elderly Dental Assistance Programme. Besides, the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme allows Hong Kong elderly persons aged 65 or above to use the vouchers for private dental services. To better meet the dental service needs of persons with intellectual disability, the Government launched a three-year project on July 16, 2018 for persons with intellectual disability named Healthy Teeth Collaboration to provide free oral check-ups, dental treatments and oral health education for adults aged 18 or above with intellectual disability.