

## LCQ5: Use of elderly health care vouchers on the Mainland

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

Question:

Regarding the use of elderly health care vouchers (HCVs) on the Mainland by the elderly of Hong Kong, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that with effect from October 2015, eligible elderly people of Hong Kong may use HCVs to pay for the fees of outpatient medical care services provided by designated clinics/departments of the University of Hong Kong – Shenzhen Hospital, of the number of person-times for which the elderly of Hong Kong used HCVs in that hospital and the total amount of fees involved each year;

(2) whether, in the past three years, it discussed the extension of the scope of application of HCVs on the Mainland with the relevant Mainland departments, healthcare services organisations of the two places as well as local medical professional groups; if so, of the latest progress, and whether an implementation timetable is in place; and

(3) whether it will consider allowing the elderly of Hong Kong to use HCVs on the Mainland to pay for the medical fees relating to disease prevention and rehabilitation treatment; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government implements the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme (the Scheme) to subsidise eligible Hong Kong elders to use private primary healthcare services. The Scheme aims to enhance primary healthcare for the elderly and provide them with healthcare choices in addition to public services, so that the elderly can have better access to medical care services that best suit their health needs from their chosen service providers. The Government launched a Pilot Scheme in October 2015 to enable voucher users to use vouchers to pay for the fees of outpatient medical care services provided by designated clinics/ departments of the University of Hong Kong – Shenzhen Hospital (HKU-SZH). Same as the arrangement in Hong Kong, elders can use vouchers at the HKU-SZH to receive preventive, curative and rehabilitative services. At present, each eligible Hong Kong elder aged 65 or above is provided with an annual voucher amount of \$2,000, which can be used for eligible services in Hong Kong and at the HKU-SZH.

My consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Wong Kwok-kin is as follows:

To facilitate Hong Kong elders who reside in areas near Shenzhen to receive outpatient medical care services in Shenzhen, the Government launched the Pilot Scheme in 2015 to enable Hong Kong elders to use vouchers to pay for outpatient medical care services provided by designated Outpatient Medical Centres and Medical Service Departments of the HKU-SZH. We chose to implement the Pilot Scheme at the HKU-SZH in view that the hospital adopts the "Hong Kong management model" and that its healthcare service quality and clinical governance structure are similar to those of Hong Kong, thus making it easier for Hong Kong elders to adapt and accept.

Breaking down by year, the cumulative number of elders who have used vouchers at the HKU-SZH from 2015 to 2019 (up to October 2019) was 500, 1 200, 2 100, 3 400 and 4 400 respectively. As regards the annual amount of vouchers claimed, it was around HK\$540,000, HK\$1.47 million, HK\$1.85 million, HK\$3.49 million and HK\$3.21 million from 2015 to 2019 (up to October 2019) respectively, totalling around HK\$10.57 million.

The HKU-SZH conducted an opinion survey on the use of vouchers at the hospital. According to a report published by it in October last year, the Pilot Scheme was well-received. Out of the 384 elders interviewed, 92% was satisfied or very satisfied with the services received at the HKU-SZH paid for by vouchers under the Pilot Scheme. 73% of the elders interviewed indicated that their reason for choosing the HKU-SZH was the "Hong Kong management model" that it adopts. The review of the Scheme completed by the Department of Health (DH) earlier this year also made reference to the above survey results. In view that the Pilot Scheme's operation was smooth and the feedback received was positive, and that the number of elders using vouchers at the HKU-SZH continued to increase, the Government regularised the Pilot Scheme on June 26, 2019 to provide greater certainty for Hong Kong elders to continue to use vouchers at the HKU-SZH.

We review the overall operation of the Scheme from time to time and maintain dialogue with relevant stakeholders. With regards to the coverage of vouchers, in view that the policy objectives of the Scheme are to enhance primary healthcare services for the elderly, provide them with additional choices in the private sector and promote the concept of family doctors, we consider that vouchers should continue only to be used for outpatient medical care services, and should not be extended to areas such as inpatient services, day surgery procedures or buying health insurance, etc.

We have considered whether there are suitable medical institutions for extending the use of vouchers on the Mainland. We need to consider the quality of healthcare, clinical governance structure, administrative procedures, financial arrangement, operating environment and employee skills of the institution concerned, as well as the views of other stakeholders (including healthcare professionals and patients in Hong Kong). We are also particularly concerned about how to monitor voucher use. Since the relevant

laws and codes of practice of Hong Kong are not applicable to medical institutions and healthcare professionals in places outside of Hong Kong, if there is non-compliance with the requirements of the Scheme and the institution(s) or individual(s) concerned have no connection with Hong Kong, it would be very difficult for the DH to follow-up and assist the elders. At this stage, the Government has no arrangements in relation to further extending the use of vouchers on the Mainland.