

LCQ6: Emergency respite and emergency home care services for the elderly and persons with disabilities

Following is a question by the Dr Hon Fernando Cheung and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (March 20):

Question:

Some carers of the elderly and persons with disabilities (PWDs) have relayed to me that currently, there is a lack of emergency respite and emergency home care services for the elderly and PWDs, resulting in some carers who were taken ill during late hours having to give up receiving treatment in hospitals. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will examine the provision of subsidised emergency respite and emergency home care services for the elderly and PWDs (including persons with severe disabilities) to be operated round-the-clock in all districts in Hong Kong; if so, of the details (including the timetable); if not, the reasons for that; and

(2) given that subsidised residential care homes (RCHs) often refuse, on grounds of their inability to provide medical care services, to provide respite care service for those who need intensive medical care or those who suffer from impaired consciousness (such as persons with severe dementia and vegetative persons), whether the Government will request the Hospital Authority to provide such service or help subsidised RCHs obtain the relevant resources to provide such service; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the Member's question is as follows:

The Government is committed to providing various community care services for elderly persons and persons with disabilities and support services for carers, assisting elderly persons and persons with disabilities to live in the community, strengthening carers' caring capacity and relieving their stress, so as to improve the quality of life of elderly persons, persons with disabilities and carers. Support services provided by the Government include respite services for elderly persons and for persons with disabilities, which provide temporary and short-term day and residential care services for persons living in the community who require assistance from family members or

relatives in their personal care. This allows carers to be temporarily relieved from their caring responsibilities when necessary, thereby reducing their pressure and allowing them to manage their personal commitments.

At present, the Government provides a total of 170 designated day respite places in 39 subvented day care centres/units for the elderly (DEs/DCUs). All DEs/DCUs can also make use of any of their casual day care vacancies to offer respite service. In addition, the 60 Integrated Home Care Services Teams and 34 Enhanced Home and Community Care Services Teams currently provide home respite service for service users, and would arrange respite service for elderly persons in need. The home care services teams also offer, through hotlines, 24-hour emergency support to provide elderly persons and their carers with necessary information and assistance during emergencies.

As regards residential respite service for elderly persons, in addition to the 55 designated residential respite places provided by subvented residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) and contract RCHEs, the Government also utilises casual vacancies of the subsidised places in all subvented nursing homes (NHs), care-and-attention homes, contract RCHEs, as well as private RCHEs participating in the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme (EBPS) to provide residential respite service. Besides, the Chief Executive announced in the 2018 Policy Address that the Government would, in 2019-20, purchase additional residential places from private RCHEs participating in EBPS to increase the number of residential respite places for elderly persons, and would regularise such an initiative. It is expected that around 270 additional designated residential respite places will be provided.

In addition, the Government currently provides a total of 65 emergency residential places for the elderly in 17 subvented RCHEs and six subvented NHs. The service aims at providing emergency residential care for elderly persons when their carers encounter sudden incidents, such as having to be admitted into hospitals.

As regards respite service for persons with disabilities, the District Support Centres for Persons with Disabilities (DSCs) and the two types of home care services, including the Home Care Service for Persons with Severe Disabilities and Integrated Support Service for Persons with Severe Physical Disabilities, provide home respite service for their service users.

In addition, day respite services are provided in Day Activity Centres, DSCs, and Care and Attention Homes for Persons with Disabilities, whereas residential respite services are provided in residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs) subvented by the Government. Currently, there are a total of 158 day respite service places and 297 residential respite service places.

All RCHEs providing residential respite and emergency residential service and all RCHDs providing residential respite service operate on a 24-hour basis round the year. These RCHEs and RCHDs would not refuse to provide respite service for elderly persons or persons with disabilities because of

their poor health, physical disabilities or poor cognitive abilities, including severe dementia. Nevertheless, to protect the safety of other residents, elderly persons and persons with disabilities admitted into these types of residential places must be free from contagious disease and mentally fit for communal living, like the other residents of RCHEs and RCHDs.

If persons with disabilities have unforeseen residential needs in case of emergency, subvented RCHDs providing residential respite service could cater to such cases in the light of individual circumstances. As regards emergency residential service for elderly persons, in accordance with existing practice, these types of residential places require referrals from social workers to make placement arrangements in advance. If the elderly persons are in need of medical care, medical consultation and treatment can be arranged at suitable medical units, including the Accident and Emergency Department under the Hospital Authority.