

LCQ7: Introduction of new drugs for treating Coronavirus Disease 2019

Following is a question by the Hon Yang Wing-kit and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (February 23):

Question:

It has been reported that the Hospital Authority (HA) is negotiating with two pharmaceutical companies in the United States for procuring two oral drugs for treating Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), namely Molnupiravir and Paxlovid, which will respectively be delivered to Hong Kong in March and May this year at the earliest. Regarding the introduction of new drugs for treating COVID-19, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows when HA began negotiating with the two aforesaid pharmaceutical companies for procuring the two drugs and, in respect of each of these drugs, the quantity ordered and the cost for each course of treatment; as it is reported that Molnupiravir has lower efficacy when compared with Paxlovid, whether HA will focus on procuring the latter;

(2) given that the National Medical Products Administration has recently granted emergency approval to two combination therapy drugs (namely BR11-196 and BR11-198) developed by a Mainland pharmaceutical company for treating COVID-19, whether it knows if HA has negotiated with the pharmaceutical company concerned for procuring such drugs; if HA has, of the quantity ordered, the earliest date of delivery to Hong Kong and the cost for each course of treatment; if not, the reasons for that and whether HA will introduce such drugs expeditiously;

(3) as it is reported that a COVID-19 oral drug (namely GDI-4405), which is developed by a research and development centre in Beijing and will soon be put to clinical trials, has even higher efficacy but with lower production cost as compared with Paxlovid, whether it knows if HA will consider introducing the drug; if HA will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) whether it knows if HA has conducted regular exchanges with Mainland experts, so as to gain an understanding of the development of new drugs on the Mainland for treating COVID-19, and to introduce appropriate drugs in a timely manner; if HA has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that and whether HA will make arrangements for such exchanges expeditiously?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Hospital Authority (HA), the consolidated reply to Hon Yang Wing-kit's question is as follows:

Since the outbreak of the epidemic, the HA has been in close communication with the Food and Health Bureau and the Department of Health, keeping abreast of the latest developments in epidemic situation, scientific research and clinical treatment, as well as making reference to the evolving data from drug regulatory authorities and drug manufacturers around the world (including the Mainland) so as to provide appropriate treatment for patients infected with COVID-19.

The HA aims to ensure that drugs of proven safety and efficacy can be prescribed for patients infected with COVID-19. Experts from the HA closely monitor the efficacy and possible side effects of relevant drugs based on the evolving medical evidence. They will also make reference to the latest clinical developments and research data in the Mainland and overseas to evaluate various drugs for treatment of COVID-19, so as to update treatment guidelines in a timely manner.

As far as drug treatment is concerned, specialists of HA prescribe appropriate antiviral drug treatments as well as provide suitable therapies to patients based on the clinical conditions of individual patients and with reference to the recommendation on clinical management formulated by its experts. At present, the HA possesses the drug Remdesivir as well as the monoclonal antibodies Casirivimab and Imdevimab for clinical treatment to patients with confirmed COVID-19 who are under the care of public hospitals.

Regarding the procurement of drugs for treatment of COVID-19, the HA has been actively contacting and continuing to conduct discussions with relevant manufacturers with a view to timely purchasing and stockpiling drugs suitable for treatment of COVID-19, including new oral drugs. The HA has purchased appropriate quantities of Molnupiravir and Paxlovid based on expert advice. Given the commercial sensitivity of drug price information and in order not to prejudice fair competition in the procurement process, the HA will not disclose the unit prices of the drugs procured.

The HA will continue to closely monitor the supply and use of relevant drugs to cater for the needs of patients, and will maintain close communication with experts from the Mainland and overseas to understand the research and development of drugs treatment for COVID-19 worldwide.