

LCQ9: Developing medical tourism

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Dennis Lam and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (May 31):

Question:

There are views that Hong Kong has the conditions for developing into a first-rate medical tourism destination in Asia and in the international arena, including possessing excellent medical scientific research talents, internationally recognised clinical trial know-how, a comprehensive regulatory regime, internationally-aligned medication standards, and a well-developed commercial medical insurance market. However, the Government still does not have a clear action agenda for developing Hong Kong's medical tourism industry. Moreover, it has been reported that the scale of the Mainland medical tourism service market already reached Renminbi 118.6 billion in 2018, while the scale of the global medical tourism market is expected to reach US\$165.345 billion in 2023. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it has compiled statistics on the number of non-Hong Kong residents who came to Hong Kong to seek medical treatment in the past five years, the countries or regions from which they mainly came, and the main specialties involved in the medical treatment;
- (2) whether it has considered issuing visas for non-Hong Kong residents who come to Hong Kong for medical treatment; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) whether it can provide non-Hong Kong residents who wish to come to Hong Kong to seek medical treatment with more official advice and assistance; and
- (4) whether it has plans to assist non-Hong Kong residents who wish to come to Hong Kong to seek medical treatment in taking out commercial medical insurance in Hong Kong; if not, of the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Security Bureau, the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, the Department of Health and the Hospital Authority (HA), a consolidated reply to the question raised by Dr the Hon Dennis Lam is as follows:

- (1) Public healthcare services in Hong Kong are highly subsidised by the Government, and are mainly provided for Eligible Persons (EPs) (Note 1). While prioritising its services for EPs, the HA will also provide emergency medical services for Non-eligible Persons (NEPs). For non-emergency services, the HA will consider providing such services for NEPs having regard to their

clinical conditions on a case-by-case basis only when spare service capacity is available and services for EPs are not affected. NEPs are required to pay their medical service fees in full on a cost recovery basis when using public healthcare services. Under normal circumstances, the Government does not proactively encourage non-Hong Kong residents without urgent medical needs to seek medical treatment in the public healthcare sector.

The table below sets out the total HA's specialist outpatient (clinical) attendances of NEPs from 2018-19 to 2022-23.

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23 [Provisional figures]
HA's specialist outpatient (clinical) attendances of NEPs (Note 2)	5 971	5 797	6 284	6 789	6 793

The HA does not have the statistical information on the nationality or place of origin of NEPs.

Private hospitals do not differentiate between Hong Kong residents and non-Hong Kong residents when offering medical services, and thus currently do not maintain relevant statistics on non-Hong Kong residents who seek medical treatment. The Government will consider requiring private hospitals to provide figures in this regard.

(2) Regulation 2(1) of the Immigration Regulations (Cap. 115A), Laws of Hong Kong, stipulates that permission given to a person to land in Hong Kong as a visitor shall be subject to the following conditions of stay:

- (a) he shall not take any employment, whether paid or unpaid;
- (b) he shall not establish or join in any business; and
- (c) he shall not become a student at a school, university or other educational institution.

On the premise that the relevant conditions of stay are observed, no prior application is needed for visitors to receive medical treatment in Hong Kong, regardless of whether they are required to apply for an entry visa or not.

At present, passport holders of about 170 countries and territories may visit Hong Kong (including transit) without a visa/entry permit for a period ranging from seven days to 180 days, subject to the normal immigration requirements being met, and there is no limitation for them to receive medical treatment. For those who need to apply for visa/entry permit, as long as they are permitted to land in Hong Kong as a visitor, there is also no limitation for them to receive medical treatment.

(3) and (4) The Government observes that some private hospitals and healthcare facilities have been providing information to facilitate non-Hong Kong residents in seeking medical treatment. The Government does not proactively encourage non-Hong Kong residents to seek medical treatment in public healthcare sector, and has no plan to specifically provide information on our public healthcare services to non-Hong Kong residents outside the city.

Under the Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme (VHIS) launched by the Government in April 2019, participating insurance companies may decide on whether or not to accept applications from non-Hong Kong residents having regard to their business considerations. Local insurance companies have also been offering options of non-VHIS medical insurance products for consumers.

Currently, there is no requirement for inbound travelers to Hong Kong to have purchased insurances which cover their medical needs. If non-Hong Kong residents have already purchased travel insurance or medical insurance at their places of origin, it may have already covered the medical services used in Hong Kong depending on the specific terms of the relevant insurance policies.

All in all, considering that healthcare services in Hong Kong are mainly provided by public healthcare sector, and basically serve Hong Kong residents as target beneficiaries, currently the Government has no plans to develop medical tourism as an industry.

Note 1: EPs are holders of a Hong Kong identity card (HKIC) issued under the Registration of Persons Ordinance (Cap. 177) (except those who obtained their HKIC by virtue of a previous permission to land or remain in Hong Kong granted to them and for whom such permission has expired or ceased to be valid); or children who are Hong Kong residents and under 11 years of age; or other persons approved by the Chief Executive of the HA.

Note 2: Specialist outpatient (clinical) attendances also include attendances in nurse clinics in specialist outpatient setting. The tabulated figures have taken into account the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic.