

LCQ9: Support for patients with mental illness amid the epidemic

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Kin-por and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (May 4):

Question:

It has been reported that a number of violent incidents and family tragedies suspected to be related to patients with mental illness occurred earlier on. There are analyses pointing out that the anti-epidemic measures implemented in the past two-odd years may have affected the rehabilitation and community support services provided for patients with mental illness, and that the social distancing measures and "restriction-testing declaration" operations have also increased their mental stress, rendering them more prone to bouts of their illness. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it has compiled statistics on the number of violent incidents relating to patients with mental illness which occurred in the past two years;
- (2) whether it has assessed the impacts of the anti-epidemic measures implemented in the past two-odd years on the treatment, rehabilitation and community support services provided for patients with mental illness; and
- (3) whether the Government will consider allocating additional resources after the epidemic to resume and increase the treatment, rehabilitation and community support services provided for patients with mental illness?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Security Bureau, the Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Hospital Authority (HA), the consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Kin-por is as follows:

- (1) The Police and the HA do not maintain statistics on the number of violent incidents relating to patients with mental illness.
- (2) and (3) Amid the COVID-19 epidemic, the HA has maintained normal consultation services in psychiatric specialist out-patient clinics for patients to attend scheduled follow-up medical appointments. Patients who have rescheduled their appointments due to the epidemic will be given drug refills as appropriate to ensure that they have the necessary medication. Hospitals will provide services, if needed, through other channels for

suitable patients, e.g. following up on their conditions by phone. Meanwhile, the HA's psychiatric services are piloting a mobile application to provide telehealth services. For example, tele-consultations may be arranged when providing elderly psychiatric outreach services for suitable patients living in residential care homes for the elderly.

The HA has earmarked additional funding of around \$70 million in 2022-23 for addressing the increasing public demand for psychiatric services. Relevant measures include –

- (a) enhancing mental health services for children and adolescents (C&A) by developing specialised C&A psychiatric service in Hong Kong East Cluster and Kowloon Central Cluster in phases;
- (b) enhancing community psychiatric service by recruiting additional case managers; and
- (c) enhancing psychiatric in-patient, out-patient and consultation liaison services.

The HA will keep in view the situation, and continue to review and monitor its services closely so as to meet patients' needs. Additional resources will be allocated in a timely manner to cope with new service demand that may arise.

On the other hand, under the subvention of the Social Welfare Department (SWD), a total of 24 Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness (ICCMWs) set up by non-government organisations have been providing community mental health support services for persons such as those who are in recovery from mental illness and in need, those with suspected mental health needs as well as their family members/carers. The SWD has also deployed Mobile Vans for Publicity Service on Mental Wellness (Mobile Vans) to step up community education.

Amid the COVID-19 epidemic, ICCMWs have maintained their services, with alternative modes of communication including contacting service users by phone and conducting virtual meetings via electronic/online platforms to provide support for them. Service users can also make use of the above-mentioned platforms to obtain information on mental health support and participate in group activities/courses provided by ICCMWs. The Mobile Vans have strengthened collaboration with welfare service units, schools and so on to hold events such as online workshops and talks on emotion management to enhance community mental health education. As the epidemic situation is stabilising, the SWD will liaise closely with the operators for gradual resumption of their normal services.