

LWB responds to press enquiries on inter-departmental task force to enhance RCHs' capabilities in epidemic fight

In response to press enquiries, a spokesman for the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) today (March 29) said that the Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Ms Alice Lau, chaired the first meeting of the inter-departmental task force on enhancing capabilities of residential care homes (RCHs) in fighting against the epidemic this afternoon to review the current situation and discuss effective and feasible improvement measures.

The meeting mainly discussed how to improve RCHs' ventilation to minimise the risk of virus transmission; and the mechanism of direct admission of residents with COVID-19 but showing mild symptoms and in stable condition from RCHs to holding centres for care. This is to help public hospitals and community treatment facilities focus on patients with more clinical needs under the multi-tiered triage strategy in the epidemic fight.

On improving RCHs' ventilation, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has launched the Time-limited Programme on Enhancing Infection Control and Ventilation of RCHs in December 2020. It arranged nurses to conduct multiple on-site assessments on infection control measures and training on infection control for RCHs' staff; and arranged technical works personnel to conduct ventilation assessments and make recommendations on improvement. Meanwhile, the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust offered a one-off subsidy for RCHs to purchase equipment to improve ventilation and enhance support to residents. This subsidy scheme has also been expanded in early March 2022 to support RCHs with confirmed COVID-19 cases to install additional high-efficiency air purifiers and particulate absorbing filters.

The task force recommended to make reference to the above scheme and conduct on-site ventilation assessments to RCHs participating in the above scheme again shortly under the assistance from the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) to ensure the ongoing and effective implementation of the improvement measures. For example, the assessments may cover the ongoing and correct use of facilities including high-efficiency air purifiers and exhaust fans, if filters have been replaced with suitable maintenance, and if facilities need to be replaced and strengthened. The SWD will also request private and self-financing RCHs which are yet to participate in the above scheme to join. Other effective measures to improve ventilation which can be implemented shortly will be duly considered. In addition, the SWD and the Department of Health (DH) will arrange nurses to RCHs again for site visits on their infection control measures and training on infection control for their staff.

To make good use of the role of holding centres as part of the multi-

tiered triage strategy, the task force examined in detail the mechanism for transferring residents tested positive to holding centres. It further clarified the roles of the DH, the Hospital Authority (HA), the SWD and RCHs, enhancing co-ordination and information exchange, so that the elderly and persons with disabilities in mild symptoms and stable condition with care needs can be timely sent to holding centres, thereby relieving the burden on hospitals and reducing the risk of transmission in RCHs. Members of the task force also exchanged views on relevant issues, including transport arrangements of entering and exiting holding centres.

Members of the task force comprise representatives of the LWB, the Food and Health Bureau, the Development Bureau, the SWD, the DH, the EMSD and the HA.