

Pilot Scheme for Direct Cross-boundary Ambulance Transfer in Greater Bay Area set for official launch tomorrow

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government, in collaboration with the Guangdong Provincial Government, the Shenzhen Municipal Government and the Macao SAR Government, will officially launch the one-year Pilot Scheme for Direct Cross-boundary Ambulance Transfer in the Greater Bay Area tomorrow (November 30). The first phase of the Pilot Scheme will start by arranging direct cross-boundary ambulance transfer of patients from designated sending hospitals in Shenzhen and Macao (i.e. the University of Hong Kong – Shenzhen Hospital and the Conde S. Januario Hospital of Macao) to designated public hospitals in Hong Kong.

The Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, said, "The study on the provision of land-based cross-boundary transfer for non-emergency and non-critically ill patients and the exploration of rolling out a pilot co-operation scheme for cross-boundary referral of patients between designated public hospitals were put forward in the Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA). The Chief Executive also put forward in his Policy Address last year the initiative to explore cross-boundary ambulance transfer arrangements between hospitals in the GBA. Under the staunch support and guidance of various national ministries as well as concerted efforts of the government departments of Hong Kong, Guangdong and Macao, the Pilot Scheme is set for official launch tomorrow. This marks a new height in high-quality medical collaboration and development in the GBA while addressing the earnest anticipation of residents in the GBA. The Hong Kong SAR Government will continue to deepen healthcare collaboration with other GBA cities to further boost healthcare integration within the GBA, thus building a Healthy Bay Area through joint endeavours and starting a new chapter for high-quality development in the GBA."

Under the mechanism of direct cross-boundary ambulance arrangements, upon assessment and agreement by the teams of designated cross-boundary collaborating hospitals, arrangements can be made for patients with specific clinical needs and suitable clinical conditions to be transferred directly to Hong Kong between designated hospitals in a point-to-point mode without the handover of patients between ambulances at boundary control points, thus minimising risks posed to patients during transfer.

The Pilot Scheme has a mechanism in place to avoid abuse while ensuring the safety of cross-boundary transfer. Since medical conditions and needs vary among patients, doctors at the sending hospital will assess, on a case-by-case basis, the need for the patient to have cross-boundary inter-hospital transfer for continuous treatment or recovery services, taking the patient's clinical diagnosis and actual conditions into consideration. The doctors at the sending hospital will communicate with the Major Incident Control Centre of the Hospital Authority for joint assessment, information exchange and co-

ordination with the receiving hospital to decide whether the transfer mechanism should be activated. The sending and receiving hospitals will also ensure that the patient's relatives and/or the patient have given consent to the relevant arrangements and are informed of the risks involved in the transfer.

The Hong Kong SAR Government has been in proactive discussion and close collaboration with Guangdong and Macao governments regarding the direct cross-boundary ambulance transfer arrangements. To make full preparation, governments of the three places have conducted three drills in total in August and October this year, simulating the transfer of patients under the cross-boundary ambulance arrangements.

Subject to the effectiveness and operational experience of the Pilot Scheme, governments of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao will further consider arrangements for expanding the Scheme in its next phase.