

Public hospitals get prepared for winter service surge

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As the weather is turning cooler and the winter service surge is anticipated, the Hospital Authority (HA) will launch a series of response measures tomorrow (December 1) to cope with the increase in demand for Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department and inpatient services. Meanwhile, the HA also appeals to members of the public to get vaccinated early for seasonal flu and COVID-19 to protect themselves and their family members from being infected.

The HA Chief Manager (Cluster Performance), Dr Michael Wong, said today (November 30) that the HA allocated over \$700 million in advance through the Task Force on Service Demand Surge in the middle of this year for early preparation for the service surge. "Public hospitals have deployed resources in facilities and manpower in preparation for service enhancements to meet the surge in service demand during the period," he said.

"Resources have been reserved for public hospitals to open temporary beds according to operational needs. Manpower resources planning has started, inter alia, encouraging and assisting healthcare staff to join the Special Honorarium Scheme, and the ongoing recruitment of locum and temporary healthcare staff."

Dr Wong stressed that various services will be enhanced to expedite the turnover of hospital beds, including laboratory services; ward rounds of senior clinicians during evenings, weekends and holidays; supporting services for hospital discharge and transfer; geriatrics support to A&E Departments; and night shift nursing and supporting staff manpower.

Community support is also very important during the service surge. Dr Wong said that the HA will strengthen the Public-Private Partnership Programme to utilise the capacity available in the private medical sector, while the collaboration with private hospitals will continue to transfer suitable patients for treatment in private hospitals.

Dr Wong also appealed to the public for their understanding and co-operation. Non-urgent patients are advised to avoid using A&E Departments and to seek consultation at general out-patient clinics (GOPCs), private doctors or the 24-hour clinics of private hospitals. To choose a suitable family doctor and related clinic service, members of the public are welcome to browse the Primary Care Directory of the Food and Health Bureau at www.pcdirectory.gov.hk.

"GOPC services will be enhanced with an additional service quota of around 24 000, including a quota of around 3 500 during the long holidays.

More clinics, covering more districts, will provide services during the Christmas, Chinese New Year and Easter long holidays," Dr Wong added.

To facilitate public understanding of the public hospital service situation during the winter surge, the HA will display key service statistics, A&E Department waiting times and medical consultation information at the A website www.ha.org.hk and in "Service Surge Online" in the "HA Go" mobile application from tomorrow onwards.