

Remarks by S for Health at media session

Following is the remarks made by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, at a media session after attending a radio interview this morning (October 26):

Reporter: Regarding the "1+" mechanism, how do you see the figures that five new drugs getting approved since the implementation last November? And it will also be expanded to cover all new drugs starting this November, how significant the move is to patients in Hong Kong, as well as the pharmaceutical companies? What are the responses from the pharmaceutical companies so far? Could you also share with us the timeline of the comprehensive review on (inaudible)? When does the Bureau aim to complete the review?

Secretary for Health: The "1+" mechanism for drug registration and approval started in November last year. Over the last one year, we are very happy and encouraged to see that the pharmaceutical (companies) are very interested. We have received enquiries from over 80 companies for over 260 drug entities. We are quite encouraged to see that five drugs have already been approved under this new mechanism, particularly with a CAR-T therapy for cancer patients, which has been incorporated into the Hospital Authority Drug Formulary. We can see that the industry is very interested. But of course, it is a process. It takes time for the Drug Office under the Department of Health to streamline all the processes, guidelines and procedures.

In addition, it also takes time for the pharmaceutical industry to get used to this new mechanism. Remember that in the past, we have the "secondary evaluation", meaning that many pharmaceutical companies in Hong Kong are not used to provide objective clinical trial data, as well as applications for approval and registration, so all these pharmaceutical companies will also need to learn and prepare a new office for R&D (research and development) and registration and approval in Hong Kong. I am sure that with our new policy initiative to extend this "1+" mechanism to cover for all new chemical entities in November this year, there will be more and more interest in it. Now, any new chemical entity will be able to be registered in Hong Kong through this new "1+" mechanism. I want to highlight the fact that this also includes vaccines as well as advanced therapy products. Advanced therapy products mean not just drugs in the usual sense, but self-therapy or gene therapy which involve the processing of patients' own blood for treatment of very advanced cancers or diseases. This is very important. We anticipate that with more and more drug companies aware of this, we are able to allow patients in Hong Kong, and even in the Greater Bay Area (GBA), to enjoy more advanced therapy products or new drugs of the most advanced one, and thus elevating and improving the healthcare standard in the whole area.

And secondly, with more choices of drugs, the cost of these new treatments, drugs or new advanced therapy products will be lowered. Thirdly,

it will promote the development of R&D, research and development, in the area . This will be very important for the development of the R&D in the whole GBA. Remember we have the special drug and medical devices' connect measure in the GBA, which allows drugs and medical devices which have not yet been registered in the Mainland but already registered and used in Hong Kong to be used in specific healthcare institutions in the GBA. This is very attractive for pharmaceutical companies because once the drugs or medical devices are approved and registered in Hong Kong and used in the public hospitals, these drugs and devices will be able to have a "green channel" for use in the 68 million-population in the GBA.

About the review, we have received the report from the review committee of the Hospital Authority on October 8. Our team is reviewing it. We will ensure that the Hospital Authority will be able to follow, enforce and implement all those measures. We are looking into the details of how to implement and monitor the progress, and we will announce the results as soon as possible. Thank you.