

Safeguarding safety of frontline staff with continuous enhancement of epidemic control measures

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The Hospital Authority (HA) today (February 6) met with staff union representatives and reiterated the importance attached to the safety of staff and their concerns about protective equipment and isolation facilities amid the worsening epidemic of novel coronavirus pneumonia.

The HA Chief Executive Officer, Dr Tony Ko pointed out that since the beginning of the epidemic, additional resources have been allocated to the procurement of supplies and enhancement of infection control measures to keep up with the latest situation.

"Since the activation of Emergency Response Level by the HA, public hospitals have correspondingly enhanced infection control measures, leading to significant increase in the consumption of personal protective equipment. The global supply is currently tight for protective equipment such as masks, eye shields and protective clothing. The HA understands the concerns of frontline staff and will try the best to expedite the procurement of protective equipment for patient care."

In terms of isolation facilities, public hospitals have gradually converted the reserve isolation beds according to operational needs. The number of isolation beds has increased from 500 at the beginning of the epidemic to over 800 isolation beds, with the current utilisation rate of 42 per cent.

In addition, to reduce the risk of general wards, the HA has earlier extended the "Enhanced Laboratory Surveillance" programme to all pneumonia inpatients for early identification of novel coronavirus pneumonia patients.

"In view of staff concerns towards patients withholding travel history, the HA can also confirm patients' record of leaving and entering the territory with the support of the Immigration Department beginning today."

"There have been more local cases of infection in Hong Kong. Public hospitals count on the concerted effort of staff members to fight the epidemic. The HA hopes that employees involved in industrial action will return to work as soon as possible to join hands to combat the epidemic. The HA promised to treat all staff members absent from duty fairly with the same compassionate, reasonable and legal grounds," Dr Ko added.

The Chief Manager of Cluster Performance, Dr Ian Cheung said that the ongoing industrial actions continue to severely affect public hospital

services, including a number of emergency and essential medical services.

As at 7pm today, about 5 000 employees were absent from duty, including about 220 doctors, 3 000 nurses and 900 allied health professionals. The more seriously affected departments include Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Accident & Emergency Department and elective surgeries.

The HA Major Incident Control Centre will continue to closely monitor the operation of public hospitals. The HA will also continue to communicate with staff members and sincerely thanks colleagues staying on duty to work together to fight the epidemic.