

Secretary for Health continues to pay close attention to transfer arrangement of Hospital Authority patients

With the COVID-19 epidemic getting more severe, the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, continues to pay close attention to the collaboration arrangement on patient transfer between the Hospital Authority (HA) and private hospitals, with a view to alleviating as soon as practicable the mounting pressure being faced by the public healthcare system and safeguarding the lives and safety of citizens.

The number of daily new cases in Hong Kong has been remaining at four-digit figures on a high level, with the proportion of cases related to the Omicron mutant strain sub-lineages BA.4 and BA.5, which are of higher transmissibility, exceeding 50 per cent. It is possible that the caseload may exceed 10 000 per day shortly. If the epidemic situation continues to deteriorate, the HA may have no choice but to further adjust the scale of its non-emergency services with potential postponement of diagnosis, treatment and surgery appointments of other patients, in order to focus its resources in tending the hospitalised patients whose number is on the rise. Such a situation will be particularly undesirable.

Following an earlier meeting between Professor Lo and representatives from the Hong Kong Private Hospitals Association, all 13 private hospitals have provided a total of 364 hospital beds at the initial stage, and the number of hospital beds can be gradually brought up to around 1 000 depending on the actual demand. Upon close liaison between the HA and private hospitals in recent days, Professor Lo is pleased to learn that private hospitals have shown support to the appeal by expediting acceptance of patients referred by the HA in general and some have also allocated more hospital beds, thereby making available at least 380 hospital beds for use at present (see Annex).

Professor Lo said, "The issue on how to make good use of private hospital beds to assist the public healthcare system in focusing its resources for combating the epidemic has become a matter of concern in the community of Hong Kong. I hope that private hospitals can fulfill their social responsibility and meet the public expectations by continuing their collaboration with the HA and resolving difficulties in a positive and pragmatic manner, in a bid to expedite the transfer arrangement for HA patients to receive early treatment in private hospitals."

Professor Lo would like to express gratitude to CUHK Medical Centre, St. Teresa's Hospital and St. Paul's Hospital for providing more hospital beds in order to receive a higher number of HA patients. He is also pleased to observe that the utilisation of hospital beds among various private hospitals

has improved. As for individual private hospitals which are yet to have a satisfactory admission of patients, the HA has taken the initiative to meet with relevant management teams so as to enhance communication and jointly explore solutions.

The HA once again calls for patients and their family members to cooperate with the transfer arrangement. Public hospitals will conduct a professional evaluation to ensure that a patient is suitable for transfer to private hospitals before making the arrangement. Patients only need to pay at a level equivalent to the charges of HA services for their stay at the private hospitals, and those who are eligible for medical fee waiver will still be able to enjoy such waiver as in the case of using HA services.

In view of the evolving epidemic development, the Government will keep a close watch on the admission of HA patients by private hospitals and expect that the HA may obtain more private hospital beds for patient transfer when there is an actual need in future, thereby maintaining the operation of the public healthcare system and protecting the welfare of patients.