

Speech by CS at Jockey Club End-of-Life Community Care Project International Conference (English only)

Following is the video speech by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, at the Jockey Club End-of-Life Community Care Project International Conference today (June 17):

Mr Cheung (Executive Director of Charities and Community of the Hong Kong Jockey Club, Mr Cheung Leong), Professor Shen (Vice-President and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) of the University of Hong Kong, Professor Max Shen), Professor Chow (Project Director of the Jockey Club End-of-Life Community Care Project (JCECC), Professor Amy Chow), distinguished guests from around the world, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon. It is my great pleasure to join you all here today at the Jockey Club End-of-Life Community Care Project International Conference. First of all, let me extend my warmest congratulations to the JCECC Project Team on their successful efforts in bringing together renowned academics and experts from around the world to this conference.

The theme of this conference is "Community End-of-Life Care: Sustainable Development and New Frontier". It gives us all a precious opportunity to discuss and reflect on the more sustainable practices in promoting end-of-life care, especially against the backdrop of the whole world's prolonged, hard fight against the COVID-19 pandemic for nearly a year and a half by now.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been taking a toll on the public health systems all over the world. The elderly population is at the highest risk for serious illness with COVID-19. Elderly care is strained to balance service provision and potential health risks. We in Hong Kong have implemented very restrictive visitation arrangements to protect those living in elderly homes and hospitals from getting infected. This has proven to be effective, but has also made it quite inconvenient for people to meet their loved ones in person.

While we have been trying our very best to tackle the immediate problems brought to us by the pandemic, we have not lost sight of our medium-term endeavours to address the problems arising from an ageing population. In Hong Kong, the proportion of elderly population at 65 or older is expected to increase significantly from one in six now to one in three in just 20 years from now.

One of the principal issues associated with a rapidly ageing population is the growing demand for quality end-of-life care services. To this end, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is committed to

providing quality and holistic end-of-life care. Various initiatives have been put in place over the years, including improvement in facilities and hardware, public education, and the training and development of healthcare professionals.

While our care service providers have been taking centre stage to deliver and improve end-of-life care services, the Government has also been working behind the scenes to complement the efforts through improving the legislative regime.

Our Food and Health Bureau conducted a public consultation to gauge public views on proposals to develop a clear and consistent legal framework for advance directives. These proposals are expected to facilitate the implementation of advance directives by emergency rescue personnel and the practice of dying in place. I am pleased to note that we have received widespread support from stakeholders and the community at large. I am sure that my colleagues from the Food and Health Bureau will share with you more about this during the conference.

The JCECC is one of our key partners in the public consultation and assisted us with a series of public engagement activities. While the legislative amendments are being worked out, we need the continued concerted efforts of non-governmental organisations and healthcare professionals to deliver the service and help realise the greater goal of providing quality and holistic end-of-life care to the community that we serve.

On this positive note, I would like to pay my warmest tribute to the JCECC for its sterling support and contribution to end-of-life community care. This conference will provide an invaluable opportunity for us to review the concerted efforts of the JCECC and its partners over the years, and gather global experts on palliative care to exchange experience and best practices. With such a strong line-up of distinguished speakers, I am sure that all participants will benefit immensely.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you all a very successful, inspiring and fruitful conference in the coming days. Thank you.