

SWD strives to support RCHEs and RCHDs in fighting against pandemic

A spokesman from the Social Welfare Department (SWD) said today (February 17) that, in view of the severity of the recent COVID-19 pandemic situation, the SWD fully appreciates the difficulties encountered by the residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) and the residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs), and has introduced a number of support measures to help the residential care homes (RCHs) to fight the pandemic.

According to the existing mechanism, when suspected/preliminary positive/confirmed COVID-19 cases arise among RCH residents or staff members, the Government will send the residents concerned to quarantine centres/hospitals as far as possible. As the quarantine centres/hospitals have recently admitted a large number of patients and hence unable to take up the residents, RCH operators should arrange their residents to stay inside the RCHs while they are waiting for arrangements and medical instructions. At the same time, when the residents are assessed to be suitable for discharge from hospitals or quarantine centres, the RCHs should comply with the arrangement and provide care services for the residents.

The following are the support measures provided by the SWD to RCHEs and RCHDs:

(1) Rapid antigen test kits

The SWD delivered COVID-19 rapid antigen test kits to staff members of all RCHEs and RCHDs on February 15. Staff members are required to perform rapid tests on a daily basis before work and obtain negative results in order to perform duties at RCHs.

(2) Special anti-pandemic allowance for RCH staff

To recognise the extra effort of RCHE and RCHD staff members in taking care of the elderly and persons with disabilities in RCHs during this critical period to fight against the epidemic, the Government will provide a special anti-pandemic allowance for all eligible RCHD and RCHE staff members. A monthly special allowance of \$2,000 per person will be granted to all RCHE and RCHD staff members for five months from February to June this year through the RCH operators.

(3) Special grant for RCHs (Sixth Round)

To assist RCHs in stepping up the preventive measures against the pandemic, the SWD will give out the sixth round of a special grant to all RCHEs and RCHDs so that they can purchase personal protective equipment and disinfection products (RCHs with 40 beds or above can each receive \$20,000, while RCHs with 39 beds or below will each receive \$12,000).

(4) Special allowance for manpower support

Starting from 2020, the SWD has provided special allowance for manpower support to compensate the extra expenses of the RCHEs and RCHDs in making necessary staff arrangement (including hiring of temporary staff/relief staff or internal deployment of staff to work overtime) either because (i) their staff members need to receive treatment because they have contracted COVID-19; or (ii) their staff members are classified as "close contacts" so that they cannot return to their positions as a result of compulsory quarantine.

(5) Distribution of masks

Starting from 2020, the SWD has been distributing masks to all RCHEs and RCHDs for the use of their staff members. The SWD will continue to provide masks to RCH staff.

Apart from the aforementioned five measures, the following three additional support measures will be available to the RCHs under on-site quarantine/isolation:

(6) Extra allowance for RCH staff under on-site quarantine/isolation

To support RCHs in providing care services for their residents under on-site quarantine/isolation, the SWD will provide an extra allowance for RCH staff members in order to help the RCHs to maintain operation. An extra allowance of \$500 per day will be given to each staff member who takes care of the residents during on-site quarantine/isolation in recognition of their efforts.

(7) Additional special allowance for RCHs under on-site quarantine/isolation

To assist RCHs in purchasing necessities to enhance the care services for residents under on-site quarantine/isolation, the SWD will provide additional special allowance to RCHs undergoing on-site quarantine/isolation so that they can purchase personal protective equipment and disinfection supplies (RCHs with 40 beds or above can each receive additional \$20,000, while RCHs with 39 beds or below will each receive additional \$12,000).

(8) Personal protective equipment

The SWD will also distribute personal protection equipment (such as surgical masks, disposable gowns, goggles, shoe covers and gloves) to RCHs under on-site quarantine/isolation according to their needs.

In addition, the SWD has issued guidelines for on-site quarantine/isolation arrangement to all RCHs.

The SWD calls on the operators and staff members of the RCHs to cater for the best interests of the residents and continue to provide care services for their residents. RCH operators/supervisors should also be considerate to their staff members during this difficult time, and explore different ways to encourage their staff to fight the virus in unison.