

LCQ3: Provision of new targeted therapy drugs and financial assistance for cancer patients

Following is a question by the Dr Hon Chiang Lai-wan and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (June 6):

Question:

Some patient groups have relayed that quite a number of new targeted therapy drugs with significant benefits in curing cancers have come onto the market in recent years, but most of them have not been incorporated into the list of Self-Financed Items (SFIs) under the Drug Formulary of the Hospital Authority (HA). This, coupled with the stringent eligibility criteria for applications under the Samaritan Fund and the Community Care Fund, has resulted in cancer patients who cannot afford the medication costs not being able to grasp the opportunities for treatments, thereby undermining patients' rights and interests. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will request the HA to expedite its appraisal procedure so as to incorporate those new targeted therapy drugs with significant benefits in curing cancers into the list of SFIs; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it will relax the eligibility criteria for applications under the two aforesaid relief funds and raise their subsidy ceilings, so that more cancer patients in need can obtain assistance; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will consider setting up a new dedicated fund to subsidise cancer patients with financial difficulties in receiving expensive treatments (including treatments with targeted therapy drugs); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government and the Hospital Authority (HA) place high importance on providing optimal care for all patients, including cancer patients, and assuring patients of equitable access to safe, efficacious and cost-effective drugs under our highly subsidised public healthcare system. My consolidated reply to the various parts of the question raised by Dr the Hon Chiang Lai-wan is as follows.

â€‹ The HA has an established mechanism for regular appraisal of new drugs and review of its Drug Formulary and the coverage of the safety net. As pledged in last year's Policy Address, the Drug Management Committee under the HA and other committees concerned will more closely monitor the research developments and the accumulation of medical scientific evidence for new drugs so that needy patients could receive early treatment. The Drug Advisory Committee of the HA currently conducts meetings once every three months to appraise new drugs. The whole appraisal process follows the principles of evidence-based medical practice, rational use of public resources, targeted subsidy, opportunity cost consideration and facilitation of patients' choice, and takes into account the safety, efficacy and cost-effectiveness of drugs and other relevant factors, including international recommendations and practices, advance in technology, disease state, patient compliance, quality of life, actual experience in the use of drugs as well as the views of professionals and patient groups. In appraising new drugs, especially expensive ones, the HA will also carefully examine the long-term financial sustainability of the drug therapies with a view to providing all patients with appropriate treatments. The HA will include approved drugs in the Drug Formulary or under the coverage of the safety net as appropriate.

â€‹ Currently, the HA Drug Formulary includes effective drugs for the treatment of various diseases. These drugs, including targeted therapy drugs for treating cancer, are provided for patients at standard fees and charges. The HA has been extending the coverage of its Drug Formulary through regular review. Self-financed cancer drugs are incorporated into the Drug Formulary's special drug category in phases and provided for patients with specific clinical indications at standard fees and charges.

â€‹ The HA provides a safety net for patients with financial difficulties in respect of specific self-financed items through the Samaritan Fund and the Community Care Fund (CCF) Medical Assistance Programmes, under which eligible patients are subsidised to purchase self-financed drugs covered by the safety net. As at April 2018, a total of 29 self-financed drugs proven to be of significant benefits were covered by the Samaritan Fund. Among them, 13 are for cancer treatment, of which 10 are targeted therapy drugs.

â€‹ To provide cancer patients with more support, the Government and the HA launched the First Phase Programme of the CCF Medical Assistance Programmes in August 2011 to offer patients financial assistance to purchase specified self-financed cancer drugs which have not yet been brought into the Samaritan Fund safety net but have been rapidly accumulating medical scientific evidence and have relatively higher efficacy. As at April 2018, a total of 16 self-financed cancer drugs have been covered by this Programme and 13 of which are targeted therapy drugs.

â€‹ The appraisal of drugs is an on-going process driven by evolving medical evidence, latest clinical developments and market dynamics. At this stage, more scientific evidence is required to confirm the clinical efficacy and cost-effectiveness of most newly-developed drugs for cancer treatment and the actual benefits to patients. The HA will keep abreast of the latest development of clinical treatment and scientific evidence, heed the views and

suggestions of patients' groups, and continue to review the Drug Formulary and the coverage of the safety net under the principle of rational use of limited public resources while maximising the health benefits for patients in need. The HA is also examining the extension of the coverage of the CCF Medical Assistance Programmes to provide patients with subsidies for specific drug treatments according to individual patients' special clinical needs, including subsidising eligible patients to participate in compassionate programmes of individual pharmaceutical companies.

â€‹ To alleviate the financial burden on cancer patients, the HA has been in close liaison with pharmaceutical companies on the setting up of risk sharing programmes for specific cancer drugs. Under the programmes, the HA, patients and pharmaceutical companies will contribute to the drug costs in specific proportions within a defined period, or the drug treatment costs to be borne by patients will be capped. The aim is to facilitate patients' early access to drug treatments and provide the patients with sustainable, affordable and optimal drug treatments in the long term.

â€‹ The HA has commissioned a consultancy study to review the current financial assessment and patient's co-payment mechanism under the Samaritan Fund and the CCF Medical Assistance Programmes. Improvement measures will be put forward in the light of the review findings with the aim of providing more appropriate assistance for patients in need. The Government has earmarked funding in the 2018-19 Budget for this purpose. Actual use of the funding will be subject to the review findings and recommendations.

[AFCD to launch dog inoculation campaign at fishing ports](#)

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) will hold a dog inoculation campaign at fishing ports in Hong Kong. Fishermen can have their dogs vaccinated against rabies and microchipped and the licences renewed.

AFCD mobile vaccination teams will visit the following fishing ports according to the schedule below:

Aberdeen	June 13
Shau Kei Wan	June 20
Cheung Chau	June 27
Sam Mun Tsai	July 4
Sha Tau Kok	July 6
Castle Peak	July 11
Sai Kung	July 18

The half-yearly dog inoculation campaign was launched in 1980 with the aim of providing a licensing renewal and rabies vaccination service for dogs kept by fishermen who work on board fishing vessels most of the time. The vaccination teams will visit the fishing ports from 10am to 3pm. A fee of \$80 will be charged for each dog. To date, more than 7 300 vaccinations have been given to dogs on fishing vessels.

An AFCD spokesman said that the service is one of the proactive measures to prevent rabies, a fatal disease that is transmitted to humans from animals. Dogs on board vessels that have visited overseas countries may have come in contact with other animals carrying diseases, making them more susceptible to rabies infection.

"Although Hong Kong has been free from animal rabies since 1987, we must remain vigilant to prevent any possible outbreak," the spokesman said.

Under the Rabies Ordinance, all dogs aged over five months must be vaccinated against rabies, licensed and microchipped. Dogs have to be revaccinated against rabies and their licences have to be renewed at intervals not exceeding three years. Dog owners who fail to do so are liable to a maximum fine of \$10,000.

[Make prior work arrangements for rainstorms](#)

The Labour Department (LD) today (June 6) reminded employers to make prior work arrangements for staff in times of rainstorms as soon as possible.

"To avoid disputes and confusion, employers should make prior work arrangements for staff and contingency measures in times of and rainstorms," an LD spokesman said.

"In working out and enforcing the arrangements, employers should give prime consideration to employees' safety both in the workplace and during their journeys to and from work, and adopt a flexible approach. Whenever possible, they should consult their staff."

The work arrangements should cover the following matters:

- * Whether employees are required to report for duty when different rainstorm warnings are issued;
- * After a rainstorm warning is cancelled, the time for staff who have not reported for duty to resume work and the arrangements;
- * How wages and allowances (if any) will be calculated for staff who are

required to report for duty and those who are late for work or absent from work during rainstorms; and

* For employees who are required to travel to and from workplaces during rainstorms, whether transport facilities will be provided to them and, if so, the arrangements.

"Employers should make realistic assessments of the requirements for essential staff and require only absolutely essential staff to report for duty in adverse weather conditions. If Amber, Red or Black Rainstorm Warning is issued during working hours, employees working indoors should remain on duty as usual and stay where they are unless it is dangerous to do so. Supervisors of employees working outdoors in exposed areas should suspend outdoor duties as soon as practicable. They should arrange their employees to take shelter temporarily and resume duty when weather conditions so permit. When Black Rainstorm Warning is issued, employees should resume duty until the warning is lowered and weather conditions permit. If Black Rainstorm Warning remains in force at the end of working hours, for safety reasons, employers should provide employees with an area in the workplace as temporary shelter for them to stay if they want to."

"If possible, employers should provide transport services for employees who are still required to travel to and from workplaces when the Black Rainstorm Warning is in force, or give them a special travelling allowance as encouragement."

"For staff who have practical difficulties in resuming work promptly upon cancellation of a rainstorm warning, employers should give due consideration to the circumstances of individual employees and handle each case flexibly."

"As rainstorms are natural calamities that cannot be avoided, employers should not deduct wages of employees who are absent from or late for work because of inclement weather. Neither should employers dismiss an employee summarily based on these grounds," he said.

The spokesman also reminded employers to observe the statutory liabilities and requirements under the Employment Ordinance, the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance, the Employees' Compensation Ordinance and the Minimum Wage Ordinance.

Employers should not deduct the annual leave, statutory holidays or rest days employees are entitled to under the Employment Ordinance so as to compensate for the loss of working hours resulting from employees' failure to report for duty upon the announcement of a Black Rainstorm Warning. An employer who without reasonable excuse fails to comply with relevant provisions under the Employment Ordinance is liable to prosecution.

Employers should also note that they have an obligation to maintain a safe workplace for their employees under the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance.

"If employees are required to work in times of rainstorms, employers should ensure that the risks at work are properly controlled and reduced to levels that are as low as reasonably practicable," the spokesman said.

Under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance, employers are liable to pay compensation for deaths or injuries incurred when employees are travelling by a direct route from their residences to workplaces, or from workplaces back to residences after work, four hours before or after working hours on a day when Typhoon Signal No. 8 or above or a Red or Black Rainstorm Warning is in force.

To provide practical guidelines and samples of work arrangements for the reference of employers and employees, the LD has issued the booklet "Code of Practice in times of Typhoons and Rainstorms". The code can be obtained from the branch offices of the Labour Relations Division or downloaded from the department's webpage (www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/wcp/Rainstorm.pdf).

Employers, contractors and employees should be aware of electrical safety at work during rainstorm

As the rainstorm warning has been issued by the Hong Kong Observatory, the Labour Department (LD) reminds employers and contractors that they should adopt necessary work arrangements and take suitable safety measures to protect the safety of their employees when they are carrying out electrical work or handling electrical plant.

A spokesman for the LD said today (June 6) that employers and contractors should avoid assigning employees to carry out electrical work (like electric arc welding work) or handle electrical plant at places affected by rainstorms, and should refer to the "Code of Practice in times of Typhoons and Rainstorms" and the "Guide on Safety at Work in times of Inclement Weather" issued by the LD.

Even if electrical work is carried out or electrical plant is handled at places not affected by the rainstorm, suitable safety measures must still be adopted to prevent electric shock as the air would be more humid. Such measures include:

- (i) Ensure that all live parts of an electrical installation are isolated from the power supply source and rendered dead, and the isolation from the power supply source must be maintained as long as electrical work is being carried out;
- (ii) Before carrying out any electrical work or handling any electrical

plant, cut off and lock out the power supply source, then test the circuit concerned to confirm it is dead and display suitable warning notices, and issue a work permit thereafter;

(iii) Ensure that protective devices (such as suitable and adequate fuses and circuit breakers) for the electrical installations or electrical plant have been installed and maintained in good working order, and portable electric tools must be double-insulated or properly earthed;

(iv) Provide suitable personal protective equipment such as insulating gloves and insulating mats for employees; and

(v) If live electrical work is unavoidable, a comprehensive risk assessment should be conducted by a competent person and the appropriate safety precautions should be taken to remove or properly control the electrical hazards involved before such work can proceed.

In addition, employees should co-operate with the employer or contractor to follow the safety instructions and use the safety equipment provided.

The LD has published guidebooks and leaflets on electrical work safety. These safety publications are available free from divisional offices of the department or can be downloaded from its website (www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/content2_8.htm).

Should there be any questions about occupational safety and health matters, please contact the Occupational Safety Officer of the LD at 2559 2297.

Public urged to report flooding

Attention duty announcers, radio and TV stations:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible and repeat it at suitable intervals:

Members of the public are advised to report any street flooding that comes to their notice to the Drainage Services Department by calling the 24-hour drainage hotline on 2300 1110.