

LCQ20: Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Healthcare Talents Visiting Programmes

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Pui-leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (December 6):

Question:

The Hospital Authority (HA) has launched the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) Healthcare Talents Visiting Programmes (the Programmes), with the aim to deepen professional exchanges of healthcare workers in Hong Kong and the Guangdong Province and foster the development of public healthcare services in Hong Kong and the Mainland. It has been reported that the first batch of healthcare professionals (i.e. 83 healthcare professionals from the Guangdong Province) came to Hong Kong for exchanges in April this year, and the second batch of healthcare professionals is expected to arrive in Hong Kong at the end of this year. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as it is learnt that HA has alleviated the manpower pressure on the public healthcare system with the launch of the Programmes, but the relevant healthcare professionals only come to Hong Kong for short-term exchanges, whether it knows how HA alleviates the problem concerned through the Programmes;

(2) whether it knows the number of the second batch of healthcare professionals coming to Hong Kong for exchanges and their healthcare professions;

(3) whether it knows when HA expects to arrange for Hong Kong healthcare professionals to go on exchanges to public hospitals in the Guangdong Province, and of the relevant details; and

(4) as it is learnt that HA hopes to regularise the Programmes in the future in order to establish a talent pool of healthcare professionals in GBA, of the relevant details and implementation timetable?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Hospital Authority (HA), the consolidated reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Chan Pui-leung is as follows:

The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and the HA have all along been actively exploring various collaboration

models with stakeholders to drive the exchange and co-operation of healthcare talents in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), with a view to enhancing the professional standard of clinical healthcare and its development in the GBA in a collective manner. With support from the Health Commission of Guangdong Province and the Health Bureau of the HKSAR Government, the HA launched the Greater Bay Area Healthcare Talents Visiting Programmes in the fourth quarter of 2022. It aims to establish a sustainable exchange mechanism to foster the professional exchange among healthcare workers of the public healthcare systems in the GBA. The first phase of the programmes, with Guangdong Province as the pilot, covers various clinical healthcare professions such as doctors, nurses, Chinese medicine practitioners and radiographers. With the progressive implementation of the exchange programmes, interactions among healthcare workers in different areas of the GBA will be strengthened, such that they will become familiar with the operation of the healthcare systems in other areas. This will be conducive to the building of an overall healthcare manpower pool in the GBA and enhancement of its standard.

As at end of October 2023, a total of 10 doctors, 70 nurses, seven Chinese medicine practitioners and five radiographers from different cities in Guangdong Province have come to Hong Kong and commenced exchange of different forms in the hospitals of the HA. The duration of exchange in Hong Kong of the healthcare professionals from Guangdong Province is determined and arranged correspondingly having regard to the exchange format and actual circumstances of the respective healthcare professions. Taking doctors as an example, the 10 doctors from Guangdong Province who participated in the first phase of the exchange will be in Hong Kong for a period of one year. They have been approved by the Medical Council of Hong Kong to practice with limited registration. Generally speaking, the maximum duration of limited registration is three years. Upon expiry of the registration, one can apply for renewal. During the exchange period, apart from training programmes, a number of those healthcare professionals participate in clinical services in a co-ordinated manner. This provides a good opportunity for mutual learning and enhancement of clinical work standards for healthcare professionals of both places, and helps alleviate the pressure of manpower shortage in the HA. Healthcare professionals of both places involved in the relevant programmes have expressed positive response to the programmes, indicating that anticipated outcomes have been achieved.

Based on the successful implementation of talent exchange and co-operation with Guangdong Province in the first phase, "The Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address" has put forward the strengthening of two-way training and exchange of healthcare talents between Hong Kong and the Mainland. On this, the HA is committed to progressively driving various visiting programmes, further extending the depth and breadth of talents exchange. Specifically, the HA will continue with the Greater Bay Area Healthcare Talents Visiting Programmes and is planning the second batch of exchange programmes with the Health Commission of Guangdong Province. Under the co-ordination of the Health Commission of Guangdong Province, it is anticipated that over 100 healthcare professionals from different cities of Guangdong Province will come to Hong Kong for exchange in the first quarter of 2024.

More professional healthcare disciplines will also be covered in the second batch of exchange programmes, e.g. ophthalmology. On the other hand, the HA has reached consensus with the Health Bureau of Macao to launch the Macao Specialist Trainee Programme. The first batch of doctors from Macao is expected to come to Hong Kong for training in the first quarter of 2024.

In the meantime, the HA is actively exploring with the Health Commission of Guangdong Province and relevant units on sending its staff to the public hospitals in Guangdong Province for learning and exchange, including arranging the HA's radiographers to visit Tier III Class A hospitals in Guangdong Province for technical exchange for mutual benefits. In addition, the HA is also gradually planning to actively explore with other regions or cities of the Mainland, such as Beijing and Shanghai, to establish two-way talent exchange, including studying the feasibility of sending outstanding healthcare professionals from Hong Kong to the Mainland for learning and exchange in the latter's public healthcare system. Relevant arrangements are expected to be gradually in place next year.

LCQ21: Providing treatment for patients suffering from depression

Following is a question by the Hon Lam So-wai and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (December 6):

Question:

It is learnt that there are over 300 000 people in Hong Kong suffering from depression. Among them, those with mild symptoms are affected in their daily lives, and those with severe symptoms have strong suicidal tendencies. However, if patients receive appropriate treatment early, most of them can recover. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that according to the statistics of the Hong Kong Jockey Club Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention of the University of Hong Kong, the suicide rate of young people aged 15 to 24 surged from 6.2 in 2014 to 12.2 in 2022, hitting a record high, whether the Government has (i) examined, among such persons who had committed suicide, the number of those suffering from depression, and (ii) reviewed the adequacy of the support as well as diagnostic and treatment services provided to young people suffering from depression;

(2) as it is learnt that medications and psychotherapy have insignificant effects on some patients suffering from depression, and more and more studies have confirmed that Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS) has a curative effect, and that the efficacy of TMS would be enhanced when complemented by

psychotherapy, whether the Government will request the Hospital Authority (HA) to fully introduce TMS to provide patients suffering from depression with treatment carrying a better curative effect; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) given that as of May this year, TMS is available in seven hospitals under the HA, and at present, some websites under the HA also provide information relating to TMS, but no relevant information is provided on the website of the "Shall We Talk" mental health promotion and public education initiative under the Government, of the relevant reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Security Bureau, the Department of Health and the Hospital Authority (HA), the consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Lam So-wai is as follows:

(1) The HA provides mental health services in an integrated and multi-disciplinary approach. Psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, clinical psychologists, occupational therapists and medical social workers provide comprehensive medical services to patients with mental health needs (including patients with depression) according to their medical conditions and clinical needs.

In 2022-23, about 1 810 of the psychiatric patients diagnosed with depression in the HA (including in-patients as well as specialist out-patient clinic and day hospital patients) are below the age of 18. Relevant international and local studies have pointed out that suicide is a complex problem caused by the interaction of multiple risk and protective factors. The Government currently does not maintain statistics on depression among young people who committed suicide. The Government will review cases of youth suicide this year to understand the underlying factors, including the involvement of mental health issues.

The HA has all along been closely monitoring the level of services provided to ensure the current support, diagnostic and treatment services for young people with depression (including in-patient services, out-patient services, day rehabilitation training and community support services) can meet their needs, such as maintaining the median waiting time for new cases triaged as Priority 1 (Urgent) and Priority 2 (Semi-urgent) categories at psychiatric specialist out-patient clinics at no longer than one week and four weeks respectively. Furthermore, the mental health support, diagnostic and treatment services for specific groups (including adolescents) will be enhanced, such as strengthening nursing manpower for psychiatric services and allied health support, with a view to ensuring that psychiatric services in public hospitals can meet the needs of patients.

(2) Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS) therapy has been introduced by phases to psychiatric services of the HA in all clusters since 2016-17. It should be noted that TMS therapy is not suitable for all patients with

depression. Psychiatric healthcare professionals in HA hospitals will refer suitable patients with depression to receive TMS therapy according to their medical conditions and clinical needs. At present, TMS equipment is available in psychiatry services in each cluster for treating depression. The HA will continue to review relevant services and consider the need of extending relevant services to more hospitals.

(3) "Shall We Talk" is a mental health promotion and public education initiative launched by the Advisory Committee on Mental Health since July 2020. "Shall We Talk" aims to (1) step up public engagement in promoting mental well-being; (2) enhance public awareness of mental health with a view to encouraging help-seeking and early intervention; and (3) reduce stigma towards people with mental health needs. In general, "Shall We Talk" does not directly introduce specific medical interventions for mental illnesses. A hyperlink to the website of the HA has been included in the "Shall We Talk" webpage about depression to provide convenient access for members of the public to browse relevant information.

LCQ4: Regulating emerging toys with potential dangers

Following is a question by the Hon Chu Kwok-keung and a reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Algernon Yau, in the Legislative Council today (December 6):

Question:

It has been reported that recently, some schools have discovered that during non-school hours, their students play with "carrot knives" or "nasal snorting energy bars" which are popular on the Mainland. Although these toys are packaged as "emerging stress relieving toys", they in fact carry hidden dangers. For instance, wielding "carrot knives" easily causes injuries to others, and some packages even bear violence-inciting expressions such as "stab whoever you dislike". As for "nasal snorting energy bars", they attract consumers with the fragrance of essential oils with unknown composition, and their twin-tube design easily causes children to mistakenly stick the tubes into their nostrils, damaging their nasal mucosa and nervous system. These toys have already been imported to Hong Kong and are even available for sale at individual stationery shops. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) how it will regulate the import, sale and possession of toys with potential dangers, and how it will strengthen the work on aspects such as law enforcement, inspection, investigation and publicity;

(2) whether it will consider reviewing the Toys and Children's Products Safety Ordinance as well as updating the relevant definitions and provisions therein in the light of the presence of emerging toys with potential dangers; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) how the Education Bureau will step up parent education to remind parents to pay attention to the safety of emerging toys, and whether it will provide schools with guidelines on prohibiting the circulation on campuses of the toys which claim to relieve stress but carry hidden dangers?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Education Bureau (EDB), our consolidated reply to various parts of the question is as follows:

The Government attaches great importance to ensuring the safety of toys and children's products and has enacted the Toys and Children's Products Safety Ordinance (the Ordinance) (Cap. 424) to regulate the manufacture, import or supply of toys and children's products for local consumption.

The Ordinance sets out the statutory safety standards of toys and children's products and stipulates that a person must not manufacture, import or supply a toy unless the toy complies with all the applicable requirements contained in one of the toy standards specified in Schedule 1 to the Ordinance. A person who contravenes the above provision is liable to a maximum penalty of imprisonment for one year and a fine of \$100,000 on first conviction and is liable to a maximum penalty of imprisonment for two years and a fine of \$500,000 on subsequent conviction.

The safety standards set out in the Ordinance are international standards or standards adopted by major economies. The Government keeps in view any updates or amendments to the safety standards so as to amend the schedules to the Ordinance annually to update the safety standards applicable to the toys and children's products supplied in Hong Kong, ensuring that the standards are up-to-date and operative versions. The last update of safety standards came into operation on August 1 this year. As regards the amendments for next year, we also just launched the public consultation on December 1 to propose updates of the safety standards applicable to toys and six classes of children's products; and the relevant amendment notice will be laid on the table of the Legislative Council in the first quarter of next year.

Moreover, the Toys and Children's Products Safety (Additional Safety Standards or Requirements) Regulation (the Regulation) stipulates that a toy supplied in Hong Kong must comply with the additional safety standards or requirements for toys supplied in Hong Kong, including the carrying of identification markings, i.e. the full name and address of the manufacturer, importer or supplier, and the bilingual warnings or cautions (with respect to the safe keeping, use, consumption or disposal) applicable to the toy; and

the compliance with the requirements on concentration of phthalates contained in a toy.

As the enforcement agency of the Ordinance, the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) proactively conducts surveillance in the market and online shopping platforms. Having conducted risk assessment, the C&ED will test-purchase different types of toys and children's products and pass them to the Government Laboratory for safety tests. Besides, the C&ED will conduct investigations into the complaints received and the cases referred from relevant government departments or organisations and take appropriate enforcement actions based on facts and evidence. In addition, the C&ED will actively follow up information about suspected unsafe toys and children's products obtained from different sources such as media coverage and measures taken by the Mainland or other overseas places against certain toys and children's products; and the news about product safety issued by law enforcement agencies and institutions of product safety outside Hong Kong.

During the approximately three-year period from 2021 to the end of November 2023, the C&ED received 67 complaints in relation to toys or children's products, conducted more than 5 200 surveillance visits or spot checks and investigated 88 cases. During the above period, the C&ED prosecuted individuals or companies involved in 12 cases. All defendants, including nine persons and three companies, were convicted and fined by the court, with the amount ranging from \$3,000 to \$32,000. The toys involved in these cases were lanterns, toy guns, wooden letter puzzles, plastic beads, squeeze toys, magnetic toy beads, joint mats and toy gun sets, etc. Furthermore, the C&ED issued 20 prohibition notices to prohibit related persons from supplying products that were believed to be unsafe for a specified period of time; and issued 97 warning letters. Meanwhile, C&ED also conducted 24 blitz checks at boundary control points to combat the import of unsafe toys and children's products into Hong Kong.

In addition to law enforcement actions, the C&ED strives to carry out compliance promotion for traders to assist the traders in understanding the relevant requirements of the Ordinance. Regarding publicity and education, the C&ED has been organising toys and children's products safety talks and distributing pamphlets about the Ordinance to students and parents, introducing and sharing safety information of toys and children's products to ensure children's safety.

Regarding school education, the EDB has all along been actively supporting home-school co-operation and promoting parent education through schools. During the growth of children, parents have the responsibility to protect and nurture their children properly, cultivate their proper values and foster their whole-person development. To enable parents to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for nurturing their children in a systematic manner, the EDB has launched the Curriculum Frameworks on Parent Education (Curriculum Frameworks) for kindergartens, primary schools and secondary schools in phases since 2021. The Curriculum Frameworks point out that parents should provide a safe and supportive family environment for their children, cultivate their children's self-management competence, good

character and positive attitudes and encourage them to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Besides, the EDB disseminates important messages on supporting the physical and psychological development of students through the one-stop parent education website "Smart Parent Net", its Facebook and Instagram pages and the YouTube channel. We will continue to provide parents with more diverse education resources and support so that they can master the knowledge and skills of parenting for promoting children's whole-person development.

Meanwhile, the EDB has been providing schools with guidelines and reminding them of cultivating a safe and orderly learning environment for students. With reference to the School Administration Guide for aided schools provided by the EDB, school rules should elaborate the basic requirements for students' behaviours around the school with a view to developing self-discipline in students, teaching, guiding and protecting them in order to prevent behavioural problems. Schools and parents have to work closely together to nurture the next generation who is able to uphold positive values and attitudes.

Missing man in Sheung Shui located

A man who went missing in Sheung Shui has been located.

Fok Sze-ying, aged 99, went missing after he left his residence in Cheung Lung Wai Estate on December 4 afternoon. His family made a report to Police on the same day.

The man was located in a hospital on Tsing Chung Koon Road in Tuen Mun at noon today (December 6). No suspicious circumstances were detected.

LCQ5: Reforming law relating to responsibilities of parents for children

Following is a question by the Hon Lam San-keung and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (December 6):

Question:

The Children Proceedings (Parental Responsibility) Bill (the Bill) seeks to reform the law relating to responsibilities of parents for children and to provide that, in determining certain questions in the children proceedings, a court must regard the best interests of a child as the paramount consideration. The Government conducted a public consultation on the Bill in 2015, and explained the reasons for not introducing the proposed legislation at this stage in its reply letter to the Panel on Welfare Services (the Panel) of this Council dated July 5 this year. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that, as mentioned in the aforesaid letter, the opposing views that the Bill "could not help divorced parents in resolving conflicts" were received during the aforesaid public consultation, whereas there are views that the legislative intent of the Bill is to clarify parents' due responsibilities for children and to protect children's interests, which has nothing to do with helping divorced parents in resolving conflicts, of the Government's justifications for using such opposing views as a reason for not introducing the proposed legislation at this stage; and

(2) as there are views pointing out that, as also mentioned in the aforesaid letter, the Panel passed motions in February 2016 and May 2017 requesting the Government to postpone the introduction of the Bill pending the provision of more support measures for the families concerned, whereas the letter also mentioned that the Government had already implemented many support measures, indicating that the Panel's concerns had been allayed, of the Government's justifications for still not introducing the proposed legislation at this stage?

Reply:

President,

The Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) prepared the draft Children Proceedings (Parental Responsibility) Bill (the legislative proposal) in 2015, to reform and consolidate the law relating to responsibilities and rights of parents for children; provide for the appointment and powers of guardians, etc. The legislative proposal introduce a statutory list covering parental responsibility (encompassing both responsibilities and rights) and providing for major decisions concerning the child's upbringing to be made upon express consent of or notification to the other parent, etc.

The LWB conducted a public consultation in November 2015 on the legislative proposal. The proportion of stakeholders in support of and in opposition to the legislative proposal at that time was about the same (i.e. 34.5 per cent on each side), while another 20 per cent considered the proposal worthy of support in principle but requested additional resources and support measures as a prerequisite. Subsequently, the Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services (the Welfare Panel) unanimously passed two motions in February 2016 and May 2017 respectively, urging the Government not to introduce the Bill into the Legislative Council at that stage, pending the provision of more support measures for separated/divorcing/divorced families, including setting up of a "maintenance board", assistance to single-parent

families in seeking financial support, enhancement of the prevention of divorce and support to divorced families, and setting up "visitation centres" in various districts.

The reply to the Member's question, in consultation with the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau, is as follows:

(1) According to the result of the public consultation conducted by the LWB in November 2015, the proportion of stakeholders in support of and in opposition to the legislative proposal was about the same (i.e. more than 30 per cent on each side). Those in support considered that the legislative proposal could protect children's best interests. Those in opposition considered that the legislative proposal not only cannot help divorced parents in resolving conflicts, but might cause more family problems for families with domestic violence background. Single-parent groups were also concerned that the new requirement for obtaining the other party's consent or giving notification on major decisions would be taken advantaged by the troublemaking party with malicious intent to obstruct and harass their spouse, causing distress to the child, and hence undermining the interests of the child. Afterwards, some representatives of groups from the social welfare sector, maintenance concern groups, single-parent groups, and women groups requested the Government to first deal with issues of support services for separated/divorced families and default in maintenance payment, before proceeding with legislation.

The LWB has always considered that enhancing the law relating to the parental responsibilities and rights on the upbringing of children would help safeguard the interests of children. Considering the views of the stakeholders and the Welfare Panel's position, the LWB considers that priority should be accorded to promoting the concept of continuing parental responsibility towards children even after divorce, strengthening co-parenting counselling and parenting co-ordination service, as well as providing children contact service, and that the legislative proposal should only be put forward again when the society has a clearer consensus.

(2) Considering the views of the stakeholders and the Welfare Panel's position, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has implemented a series of support measures in recent years. To strengthen co-parenting support services for separated/divorced families, including separated/divorcing/divorced parents and their children, the Government increased resources to set up five Specialised Co-parenting Support Centres (SCSCs) in 2019, providing one-stop specialised services for them, including co-parenting counselling, parenting co-ordination service, parenting groups or programmes and child contact service, etc., to assist separated/divorced parents in carrying out parental responsibilities under the child-focused principles, strengthening parent-child connection and providing support to children affected by parental separation/divorce and family change to promote their healthy development physically and mentally. The 65 Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) and two Integrated Services Centres also provide a spectrum of preventive, supportive and remedial services for needy families (including separated/divorced families).

In addition, to foster community awareness of the well-being of children of separated/divorced families and promote the message of co-parenting, the SWD has adopted a multi-pronged approach and enhanced public education and publicity at various platforms, including the dedicated website of "Parenthood Goes On", the publication of reference materials on joint parental responsibility and dissemination of latest information on relevant groups and programmes for separated/divorced parents and their children in various districts.

Meanwhile, the Government is committed to improving the effectiveness of the system for collecting maintenance payments and enforcing maintenance orders. Over the years, the Government has implemented a series of improvement measures to facilitate divorcees recovering maintenance payments as well as publicity and education programmes on maintenance-related issues. The Government also keeps exploring feasible measures to assist people in society who are in arrears with maintenance payments. In this regard, the Government will launch through the Community Care Fund a maintenance mediation pilot scheme to assist the parties concerned to resolve disputes through mediation. In addition, the Government will continue to collect statistics concerning maintenance so as to better consider the future work direction.

To keep abreast of the latest views of stakeholders, in particular the aforementioned stakeholders who had concerns about the legislative proposal at that time, the SWD would collect the views of service users through SCSCs and IFSCs, for the Government to consider whether there is sufficient consensus to put forward the legislative proposal again and, if so, the appropriate timing.