

LCQ5: Procuring dental services from the Mainland

Following is a question by the Hon Paul Tse and a reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (June 26):

Question:

Many members of the public who are not civil servants have relayed that in recent years, there has been a shortage of dental manpower and that the fees for dental consultations and surgeries have risen sharply, which are unaffordable for both the grass roots and the middle class. There are views that the Government should study the implementation of a scheme, which is similar to the one proposing to procure dental services from the Mainland for civil servants, to procure dental services from the Mainland or provide subsidies for members of the public who are not civil servants, so as to alleviate the plight of members of the public with dental problems through a two-pronged approach. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as there are views pointing out that dental services affordable for members of the public are limited and that the main service targets of government dental clinics are civil servants, why the Government procures dental services from the Mainland only for civil servants and not for the general public at the same time;

(2) of the estimated expenditure, service quotas, scope of treatment and implementation timetable of the scheme under consideration to procure dental services from the Mainland for civil servants; whether it has assessed the manpower in government dental clinics that can be released to serve members of the public who are not civil servants upon the implementation of the scheme, as well as the estimated number of beneficiaries; and

(3) as some members of the public opine that the Government's procurement of dental services from the Mainland for members of the public will yield more immediate results and serve the public in a more practical way than spending hundreds of millions of dollars on organising the courtesy campaign, Chubby Hearts Hong Kong and the "teamLab: Continuous" exhibition, the actual economic benefits of which are doubtful and they are even expendable, whether the Government will, from the perspective of addressing the pressing needs of the public, at least procure dental services for members of the public of Hong Kong from the Mainland cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area while studying the procurement of dental services from the Mainland for civil servants, so as to give members of the public an additional option?

Reply:

President,

I would like to express my gratitude to the Hon Paul Tse for his concern about government dental services. The Government attaches great importance to citizens' oral health. Our prevention-oriented dental care policy aims to raise public awareness of oral hygiene and health through publicity and education, and to encourage the public to develop good oral hygiene habits. In fact, the need for dental treatment or surgery due to tooth decay and gum diseases can be greatly reduced if good oral hygiene habits are maintained. Agreeing to the recommendations made by the Working Group on Oral Health and Dental Care (the Working Group) established earlier by the Health Bureau, the Government should attach more importance to prevention, early identification and timely intervention in the future development of dental services, with a view to achieving the goal of retention of natural teeth and enhancing the overall level of citizens' oral health. When considering the provision of government-funded curative dental services, long-term financial sustainability must be taken into account. It will be more cost-effective to put the emphasis on preventive primary dental services.

In consultation with the Civil Service Bureau (CSB), the consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Paul Tse is as follows:

At present, the Government mainly undertakes publicity, education and promotion of oral health, with particular emphasis on nurturing good oral hygiene habits among children from an early age, including the provision of the School Dental Care Service for children. Dental services provided or subsidised by the Government mainly cater for persons with special needs in dental care, especially (i) persons with financial difficulties and (ii) persons with difficulties in accessing general dental services, such as elderly persons in residential care homes and persons with intellectual disabilities. Besides, elderly persons can also receive dental services in the private sector under the Government's Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme.

The Government's expenditure on public or subsidised dental services has been on the rise in the past years. The total expenditure increased from \$886.4 million in 2020-21 to approximately \$1.2753 billion in 2023-24, representing an increase of about 44 per cent over three years. In the future, the Government will promote primary dental services to assist citizens in managing their own oral health and prevent oral diseases, while providing targeted services for underprivileged groups and persons with special needs by developing appropriate dental services for these groups.

On the other hand, it is stipulated in the terms of employment for civil servants that the Government will provide dental care services for civil servants and their eligible dependants. We must emphasise that this is a benefit of employees. The relevant services have been provided by government dental clinics under the Department of Health, and the expenditure is met by the resources earmarked for civil service medical and dental benefits. Such services do not form part of the public dental services provided to the general public.

To alleviate the excessively long wait of civil service eligible persons (CSEPs) for dental services amidst the increasing demand for civil service dental services and manpower shortage of government dental clinics, the CSB launched the Pilot Scheme on Dental Services (Dental Scaling) for Civil Service Eligible Persons (Pilot Scheme) last year by using the existing resources for civil service medical and dental benefits. Under the Pilot Scheme, CSEPs can receive dental scaling services at participating private dental clinics. The CSB is also looking into the feasibility of other proposals, including the provision of dental services to CSEPs in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. As the CSB is still considering the related proposals and has not yet come up with any specific plans, no further information is available at the present stage. Like the Pilot Scheme, any civil service dental services that may be implemented in the future will be funded by the resources earmarked for civil service medical and dental benefits, instead of the resources for public dental services.

As for the proposal on the procurement of healthcare services from the Mainland, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government will not arbitrarily shift its responsibility of taking care of the well-being of Hong Kong citizens to the Mainland healthcare system as it all along holds fast to shouldering the important role of safeguarding the well-being of Hong Kong citizens and providing quality healthcare services. When formulating cross-boundary healthcare measures, apart from supporting the healthcare needs of Hong Kong citizens who choose to reside in the Mainland or use the services there, the HKSAR Government will also take into account the potential impact of such measures on the social resources and livelihood of the citizens in the Mainland. At the same time, due consideration has to be given to the actual situation of each of these services. Taking dental services as an example, on the provision of emergency dental services or ongoing dental treatments for underprivileged groups and persons with special needs, we have to consider carefully whether procuring such dental services from the Mainland is suitable.

In fact, in light of the preliminary recommendations of the Working Group, the Chief Executive announced in the Policy Address 2023 a series of measures to strengthen dental services, including (i) enhancement of Community Care Fund Elderly Dental Assistance Programme services from July 2 to not only benefit elderly persons who have removable dentures fitting but also enable them to receive services such as dental scaling and polishing, fillings, tooth extractions and root canal treatment; (ii) strengthening of the Healthy Teeth Collaboration which will be extended with quotas to be expanded; (iii) the launch of the Primary Dental Co-care Pilot Scheme for Adolescents for those aged between 13 and 17, and collaboration with non-governmental organisations to increase emergency dental services targeting underprivileged groups with financial difficulties by providing an additional capacity that will be at least twice the current capacity of General Public Sessions offered by government dental clinics. The Working Group will issue the Final Report before the end of its tenure by late 2024. By then, the Government will consider the various policy directions for developing dental services.

[Phishing instant messages related to China Construction Bank \(Asia\) Corporation Limited](#)

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) wishes to alert members of the public to a press release issued by China Construction Bank (Asia) Corporation Limited relating to phishing instant messages, which have been reported to the HKMA. A hyperlink to the press release is available on the [HKMA website](#).

The HKMA wishes to remind the public that banks will not send SMS or emails with embedded hyperlinks which direct them to the banks' websites to carry out transactions. They will not ask customers for sensitive personal information, such as login passwords or one-time password, by phone, email or SMS (including via embedded hyperlinks).

Anyone who has provided his or her personal information, or who has conducted any financial transactions, through or in response to the instant messages concerned, should contact the bank using the contact information provided in the press release, and report the matter to the Police by contacting the Crime Wing Information Centre of the Hong Kong Police Force at 2860 5012.

[LCQ6: Antimicrobial resistance of bacteria](#)

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (June 26):

Question:

It has been reported that the United Nations Environment Programme has warned that by 2050, up to 10 million people may die each year due to antimicrobial resistance. In addition, a study conducted by a local university has found that Shing Mun River, Kai Tak River and the waters near various landfills contain residual medicines (including antibiotics). In this

connection, will the Government inform this Council, whether it conducted tests on the content of antimicrobial medicines such as antibiotics in local aquatic products in the past three years; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; of the measures in place to prevent the content of antimicrobial medicines in local waters, rivers and aquatic products from exceeding the prescribed limits?

Reply:

President,

Upon consultation with the Health Bureau, we provide a consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Hak-kan as follows:

Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) refers to the ability of bacteria to evolve and become resistant to previously effective medications. When patients are infected with drug-resistant bacteria, their illness may be prolonged, and may even increase the death risk. The misuse and overuse of antibiotics are the major factors leading to the development of drug-resistant bacteria.

The Government has been placing great importance on addressing the necessity of combating AMR. In 2016, the High Level Steering Committee on Antimicrobial Resistance was established, chaired by the Secretary for Health and comprising members from various government bureaux and departments, including the Health Bureau, the Environment and Ecology Bureau, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), the Department of Health, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), and the Environmental Protection Department (EPD), as well as public and private hospitals, healthcare organisations, academia and relevant professional bodies. The aim is to encourage professional sectors to collaborate and exchange ideas within the framework of "One Health". In 2022, the Government published the second Hong Kong Strategy and Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (the Action Plan), outlining strategies to tackle the threat of AMR from 2023 to 2027. The objectives include optimising the use of antimicrobials and promoting research related to AMR, such as the role and importance of the environment in the evolution of AMR.

Citizens should pay attention to personal hygiene when using antimicrobials (including maintaining hand hygiene) and follow doctors' advice on antimicrobial use, and consult doctors or pharmacists as appropriate if in doubt.

Under the "One Health" framework, relevant government bureaux and departments are working closely together through cross-sectoral co-ordination and collaboration to implement various aspects of the Action Plan.

For the antibiotics type antimicrobial drugs content testing on locally sold aquatic products, the Centre for Food Safety of the FEHD collected around 4 300 locally sold aquatic product samples for testing antibiotics residues under the food surveillance programme from 2021 to May 2024, among

which the antibiotics residues content of eight samples were found to be unsatisfactory. The satisfactory rate was 99.8 per cent. For reference, the overall satisfactory rate of the routine food surveillance programme from 2021 to 2023 was 99.8 per cent to 99.9 per cent each year. It is clear that satisfactory rate of antibiotics residues content is similar to the overall satisfactory rate of the routine food.

In addition, the AFCD has launched the Accredited Fish Farm Scheme (the Scheme) to enhance the competitiveness of local fisheries products. Under the Scheme, aquaculture farms are not allowed to use any antimicrobials without prior instructions of the AFCD or a registered veterinary surgeon. Aquaculture farms must also maintain records of the inventory and usage of drugs and feed additives. Over the past three years, the AFCD has collected around 800 local aquaculture samples for testing of antimicrobial drugs content, and all samples have met the relevant requirements.

On disposal of waste medicines, according to the Waste Disposal Ordinance (Cap. 354), expired or ineffective waste medicines (including antibiotics) generated by pharmaceutical suppliers or medical institutions are classified as chemical waste. Their storage, collection, delivery and disposal must comply with the requirements of the Waste Disposal (Chemical Waste) (General) Regulation (Cap. 354C). The relevant organisations are required to engage licensed chemical waste collectors to collect and deliver the chemical wastes to the licensed chemical waste disposal facilities for incineration or proper disposal. The EPD also issues letters to remind organisations such as hospitals and clinics to properly dispose of waste medicines generated (including antibiotics) in accordance with the legislative requirements.

As for the small amount of waste medicines generated from domestic sources, they can be disposed of as general domestic waste. The landfills in operation in Hong Kong were designed and constructed as fully contained facilities with a multi-layer composite impermeable liner system covering the entire base area of the landfills. Waste undergoes anaerobic digestion in the landfill and the leachate arising from decomposition will be fully collected and treated at the leachate treatment facility set up at the landfill, including the use of sequential batch reactors for aerobic digestion. If the leachate contains residual antibiotics, the majority of which will have been removed before discharging into public sewers.

On sewage treatment, over 93 per cent of the local population are now served by the public sewerage system. According to the research conducted by the Drainage Services Department, the sewage treatment works in Hong Kong can effectively remove most of the pharmaceutical residues (including antibiotics) in the sewage, for which the removal rate of some antibiotics in the secondary sewage treatment works can reach 90 per cent or above. These findings are on par with those of relevant overseas research studies. The amount of the residual antibiotics in the treated effluent will have been greatly reduced after the aforementioned sewage treatment process.

To protect the quality of aquatic ecosystem of Hong Kong's marine waters

and river waters, the EPD has all along been implementing routine water quality monitoring programme to provide data for water quality management and pollution control purposes. Regarding the impacts of residual antibiotic levels on the aquatic environment of Hong Kong, the EPD commissioned a local university to conduct an aquatic environmental baseline study from 2020 to 2021. The findings showed that the residual antibiotic levels in local river waters (including Kai Tak River and Shing Mun River) were comparable to data observed in other highly populated cities in the world (such as London in the United Kingdom, Glasgow in Scotland, Brussels in Belgium and Vienna in Austria, etc). The levels of the residual antibiotics in the aquatic environment of Hong Kong were lower than the "Predicted No Effect Concentration" indicating that there was no material impact on local aquatic environment.

Thank you, President.

[LCQ18: Mechanism for vetting the eligibility of applicants for admission adopted by higher education institutions](#)

Following is a question by the Hon Tang Fei and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (June 26):

Question:

It has been reported that a university has recently found that some students have provided fraudulent documentary proof of academic qualifications when applying for admission. There are views that the incident has brought potential impact on Hong Kong's reputation as an international hub for post-secondary education. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council if it knows:

- (1) the specific measures taken by various higher education institutions to ensure the authenticity and validity of documentary proof of academic qualifications submitted by applicants for admission; and
- (2) whether various higher education institutions will enhance their mechanisms for vetting the eligibility of applicants for admission to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents, thereby ensuring the quality of their students; if so, of the specific details?

Reply:

President,

Falsifying or furnishing fraudulent academic qualifications is a serious offence liable to a maximum penalty of 14 years' imprisonment. As fraudulent academic qualifications seriously affect student admission by local higher education institutions and Hong Kong's hard-earned international reputation, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and all sectors of the Hong Kong community deeply resent such act and have zero tolerance towards the matter.

Earlier on, a certain university found a very small number of cases where applicants allegedly submitted fraudulent documents when applying for admission. The university reported the incident to the Police and dealt with the incident seriously, indicating its determination of zero tolerance.

Hong Kong's higher education has unique advantages, including high teaching quality, strong basic research capabilities, extensive international connections, and close co-operation with the Mainland, representing a strong foundation. We particularly treasure the golden reputation of Hong Kong's higher education. Facing intense competition for admissions, universities have always established stringent admission procedures and mechanisms to ensure fairness and impartiality in selecting the best candidates. As the cradle of future talent, our higher education institutions must be well prepared for Hong Kong to develop itself into an international hub for post-secondary education, be it academic standards or the establishment of systems.

In response to the question raised by the Hon Tang Fei, our key replies are as follows:

(1) All of the eight University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities have formed academic boards/senates to take charge of academic matters while academic units and/or graduate schools are responsible for the administration and gatekeeping of student admission. There are rigorous admission standards and procedures as well as clear guidelines in place for stringent vetting of the academic qualifications, public examination results and relevant documents of students admitted. Generally speaking, verification is made through various channels, such as requesting the admitted students to arrange for direct dispatch of relevant proof of study (e.g. transcripts) by the respective awarding institutions to the universities concerned, checking with credible platforms (e.g. the China Higher Education Student Information website), verifying the results with the relevant examination boards directly, or requesting the applicants to arrange for direct dispatch of their results by the relevant examination boards to the universities concerned. Students may also be required to produce originals or certified copies of the certificates or transcripts for further checking when registering with the universities in Hong Kong as and when necessary. Those who are unable to furnish the required documents in the above process may have their admission offers rescinded or registration rejected.

(2) The admission mechanisms of the eight UGC-funded universities uphold the principles of merit-based selection, fairness and impartiality. All universities will continue to provide training, including collaborating with the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in this regard, inviting the ICAC to take part in reviewing or providing advice on the admission procedures, and formulating internal guidelines on corruption prevention, etc, with a view to raising anti-corruption awareness among relevant staff and ensuring the integrity of the system and fairness of the admission mechanisms. At the same time, the universities will diligently undertake their gatekeeping responsibilities and clearly demonstrate their zero tolerance stance towards using fraudulent academic qualifications to apply for admission. They will take decisive disciplinary actions upon discovery of such violations, including rescission of admission offers or expulsion, and will refer such cases to the relevant law enforcement agencies and visa-issuing authorities for follow-up action as appropriate. In addition, the universities have been paying closer attention to the recent untrue information, abetting and other illegal activities. They actively make clarifications on their websites, social media and in application forms, and remind applicants that all application materials must be accurate. Unlawful conduct will not be tolerated. In the light of the ever-changing circumstances, the universities will continually improve the arrangements to maintain their academic reputation.

Resumption of postal services to certain destinations

Hongkong Post announced today (June 26) that with the gradual scaling up of air freight capacity and provision of transit assistance by other postal administrations, postal services of the following destinations will resume from June 27. Details are given below:

Service to resume	Destinations
Speedpost	Chile, Morocco, Pakistan
e-Express	Iceland, Mexico
Air letter and packet	Albania, Puerto Rico
Air parcel	Albania, Morocco, Pakistan
Surface letter and packet	Angola, Brunei Darussalam, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, St. Pierre and Miquelon

The weight limit of Speedpost items to Canada will also be adjusted from

10 kilograms to 30kg from the same date.

Additional conveyance time may be required for mail items destined for Albania, Angola, Brunei Darussalam, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Iceland, Mexico, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, St. Pierre and Miquelon as mail items to these destinations have to be transited via other postal administrations.

Members of the public may visit the webpage of Hongkong Post at www.hongkongpost.hk/en/about_us/whats_new/notices/index_id_1410.html to check the service availability for various destinations.