

Transcript of remarks by S for Health at media session

Following is the transcript of remarks made by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, at a media session after attending a radio programme this morning (July 27):

Reporter: What procedures have to be gone through when deciding to transfer the cord blood to the child patient at the Hong Kong Children Hospital? What are the difficulties? What does the Health Bureau hope to achieve in the future regarding organ donation arrangements?

Secretary for Health: We are very grateful that all parties, including the Mainland bureaux and departments, have contributed to the smooth transfer of the cord blood stem cell from the Mainland to the Hong Kong Children Hospital. This required a lot of collaboration among different parties to ensure the cord blood, which was stored at a temperature of -178 degrees, to be able to be transferred seamlessly and in the optimal condition and temperature from the storage bank to the Hong Kong Children Hospital. This involved the Red Cross Society of China and the General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China. We are also very glad that our team of Hong Kong Children Hospital for haematopoietic stem cell transplant was highly professional and could provide services to the five-year-old kid who suffered from thalassaemia, which is a congenital disease affecting the blood production and causing severe anemia.

In the past, the only treatment is repeated blood transfusion every month or so. Because of the iron overload, they also require iron chelation therapy, but many of them can only live a life of 20 or maybe 30 years of age. But with this stem cell transplant therapy, the disease will be cured with the objective that they do not need any blood transfusion anymore, so they will be able to return to their normal life. That is really one of the miracles of advanced therapy.

These therapies are the objectives of the future development of Hong Kong as a medical innovation hub, including the stem cell transplant therapy, cell therapy such as CAR T-cell therapy and even genetic therapy, those are what we are going to develop. The Hong Kong Children Hospital is the centre of excellence for all these tertiary and quaternary services. We are concentrating all the expertise as well as the hardware. All these facilities are catering for pediatric children use. Even the environment itself is very friendly not just to the kids, but also the families. In the Hong Kong Children Hospital, we have accommodating facilities for the families, even single rooms, and the accompanying persons can stay with the kids in the room to take care of the kids. Also, the kids can have schooling; and in the play area, they even have art therapy and play therapy. These are very conducive to the overall development of these sick kids, who often have to stay in the hospital for quite a long period of time.

So we are looking forward to further development in collaboration with the Mainland, in particular I would like to highlight the rare disease centre. Rare diseases are never rare on Mainland China with the huge population of over 1.4 billion people, so we have a rare disease centre in the Hong Kong Children Hospital, with the expertise like geneticists and clinicians who are experts in these genetic diseases, in collaboration with our Hong Kong Genome Institute. And also in collaboration with the Mainland, we are developing a rare disease centre. Hopefully in the future, our babies and kids with diseases which are genetically-related, or extreme diseases like cancer and so, who require cardiovascular surgeries or neurosurgeries, will be given the best of care in the Hong Kong Children Hospital. Thank you.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)