

Transcript of remarks by S for Health on mental health support hotline

Following is the transcript of remarks made by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau; the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Mental Health (ACMH), Dr Lam Ching-choi; and the former Chairman of the ACMH, Mr Wong Yan-lung, SC, at a media session after officiating at the kick-off ceremony of the Mental Health Support Hotline this afternoon (December 27):

Reporter: How do you expect the public's demand for the hotline service? Are you worried that there will not be enough manpower handling a large amount of calls? The second question is, for those who are not willing to seek help through the hotline, how can the Government provide help to them or prevent the mental health issues from worsening?

Secretary for Health: We understand that mental health is not a simple medical issue. It is a problem which requires cross-bureau, cross-disciplined support to improve the mental health of our people. For this hotline, I have very conflicting thoughts on the future demand. Of course, we want to make sure that those who need the service will call the line, and we will have very good response from the public. On the other hand, we obviously want to see that the mental health problem is not worsening. Our service provider has a very flexible approach in the service. It provides a 24-hour, real-time, person-to-person response to any call. We have at least six staff members on the line at any time. If there is any surge in demand at any particular time, there will be on-call service for that. We want to ensure that we can cope with the service demand in case there is a need.

Former Chairman of ACMH: The Government is expecting more people calling this hotline upon the launch, so additional manpower is in place. However, there is also an automatic system. If, for any reason, nobody answers the call, it will be recorded. I think that, within half an hour, there will be someone calling back so as to make sure that each caller will receive a response. I think that will be important.

You also mentioned the additional measures to reach out to the people who are reluctant to call. I think that it is absolutely valid. That is why the hotline is only one of the many measures to be taken. It is an important one, but at the same time for those who are more reluctant, like those who are carers and those who are reluctant to seek help because of the issues they are suffering, I think that we have to reach out to them proactively. For example, I did mention that we can do more outreach work at the clinics while carers and patients are waiting at the lobbies outside clinics. There will be people reaching out to them, with more information provided to them. I think that this is one of the measures that we can take, but we have to be proactive to reach out to these people.

I just want to mention that those who are English-speaking can also call this hotline. There are some arrangements in place for interpretation

service. Necessary and appropriate referral will be put in place.

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