

Transcript of remarks by SFH at media session

Following is the transcript of remarks made by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, after attending radio programmes today (February 1):

Reporter: Secretary, can you give us some details on your work with the Immigration Department in trying to find Hubei Province travellers? How many are in quarantine or have gone through health check that they are okay? How many have left Hong Kong? Would you continue such work? My second question is with regards to regulations, you mentioned regulatory framework to prevent patients from lying about their travel and medical history. Does that mean that going forward any patient who lie about their medical history and travel history will be penalised? My third question is that you see all those videos and images of people lining up overnight for masks and medical staff are under immense pressure that they are frightening to strike. What's your message ...?

Secretary for Food and Health: In the last two days, the Immigration Department colleagues and the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health colleagues have been working together. They have been to over 500 hotels (and guesthouses) to find those who are from Hubei and still staying in Hong Kong. Most of these people, as I understand from the Immigration Department, their visa is only valid for seven days. We understand obviously there may be still these people in Hong Kong. So far after checking 500 hotels (and guesthouses), 49 people are identified. Among these 49 people, I think 30 people either have left or will be leaving Hong Kong very soon. I don't have the most updated figure, and these figures might be changing. The general procedure is that after we have identified these people, we would arrange for them to go to our quarantine camp. As their visa will be expired, some of them would leave Hong Kong very soon while some of them may choose to leave Hong Kong immediately. Right now, my figure is about 30 people who will be leaving Hong Kong or have already left Hong Kong. For the rest of the people, I don't have any update right now.

Reporter: What about the risk of those travellers posing to the society of Hong Kong? The rest of them are leaving in seven days but there is an incubation period for the virus if they have contracted the virus. Any risk from those travellers?

Secretary for Food and Health: Obviously, the reason why our Department of Health colleagues are having joint operations with the Immigration Department colleagues is that they would, first of all, check their health status. When they find them, they would ensure that they have no symptoms and put them into the quarantine camp. Health assessments would be done. The Department of Health also has a hotline. If anyone from Hubei has any problems or questions or health issues, they can call that hotline to seek advice.

Reporter: Going forward, will patients who lie about their medical and travel history be penalised?

Secretary for Food and Health: I think this is very important and I would like to make an appeal to people. When they are not feeling well and consult a doctor, they should provide an honest travel history, the symptoms and some of the issues or health problems that they faced, so that it will aid the diagnosis of the patients. Not only for the patients but also for the protection of our healthcare professionals as well. Under Cap. 599, in order to prevent the infectious diseases and the spread of the infectious diseases, there is a legal framework provided that people must give honest information to our health officers. If they do not do so, they will be penalised up to a maximum fine of \$5,000 and six months' imprisonment. Whether the Hospital Authority officers would be given the same authority, we are now urgently looking into the legislation and working towards this situation.

Third, I understand that there are unions, especially a new union in the Hospital Authority, that is going to propose a strike next week. This would affect our healthcare system and also affect the services of the Hospital Authority to our people especially amidst a new virus situation. Therefore, I would like to appeal to all the healthcare workers. I understand they are asking the Government to contain the number of people coming through the boundary so that the risk would be lower. The Government has already started to deny entry for residents who are from Hubei Province and those who visited Hubei. We have also closed down some of the boundary control points, including the West Kowloon Station of the Express Rail Link. We are now looking into the number of visitors, and analysing the numbers, so as to see if there is a need to change the strategy and do something further. We have already cut down all the tours and many of the visitors. But we would continue to analyse the numbers from the Immigration Department so that the Government can look into any further measures.

As far as the Hospital Authority is concerned, we request the Hospital Authority to have good communication with their staff. When they have any concerns or anything regarding the Hospital Authority, for example, protective gowns, masks and so on, they would have to ensure the supplies, so that we can protect our healthcare professionals.

Secondly, services are also very important because we are providing these services to our public and the general community. In this emergency situation, the Hospital Authority is already planning or already have plans in place to cut down or even cancel the non-urgent services so that they can provide better capacity for the entire system as well as to ease the workload of the healthcare professionals.

Thirdly, as far as their request for accommodation after work, the Hospital Authority is already putting in place some of their own residential hostels and also looking into the feasibility of identifying hotels for our healthcare professionals to stay after work. They are also providing an accommodation allowance, so that they can be more flexible if they want to stay in hotels nearby their home or to provide further flexibility.

As far as resources are concerned, amidst fighting towards this new virus, I appeal to all that we should work together. If the Hospital Authority needs further resources in terms of their work, the Government would definitely provide any additional resources that the Hospital Authority requires.

Finally, I would appeal to all in Hong Kong to work together to fight this disease.

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