



Public Health

Hong Kong's population of about 6.9 million in 2004 mid-year is provided with a comprehensive range of medical and health services by the public and private sectors.

The Department of Health (DH) is the Government's health adviser and regulatory authority. It safeguards community health through a range of promotional, preventive, curative and rehabilitative services.

The Hospital Authority (HA) is an independent body responsible for the management of all public hospitals. It provides medical treatment and rehabilitation services to patients through hospitals, specialist clinics and outreach services.

As at end December 2004, the number of hospital beds were about 35 000, comprising 28 476 beds in 41 public hospitals under the HA, 2 794 in 12 private hospitals, 2 463 in 25 nursing homes and 733 in correctional institutes. The bed-population ratio was 5.00 beds per thousand population. Comparable figures in other countries are: Japan 12.89 (2002), Britain 4.00 (2002), United States 3.39 (2002), Malaysia 1.78 (2003) and Singapore 3.45 (2003).

As at end December 2004, there were 11 240 medical practitioners registered with the Hong Kong Medical Council — 10 161 on the resident list and 1 079 on the non-resident list, equivalent to 1.6 medical practitioners per thousand population. In Britain, there were 2.05 (2003), in USA, 3.13 (2002), in Malaysia, 0.73 (2003), in Japan, 2.06 (2002) and in Singapore, 1.83 (2003) doctors per thousand population. The numbers of medical practitioners working in the DH and the HA are about 372 and 4 963 respectively.

Although Western medicine in both its curative and preventive forms is entirely acceptable to Chinese people in Hong Kong, many still consult Chinese medicine practitioners. As at end December 2004, there were 4 986 Registered Chinese medicine practitioners and 3 015 listed Chinese medicine practitioners practising in Hong Kong.

Government/Public Services: At the end of 2004, the DH operates 38, maternal and child health centres on Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories. In addition, the HA runs 45 specialist out-patient clinics and 74 general out-patient clinics throughout Hong Kong.

In the more populous areas, polyclinics or specialist clinics provide specialist clinic sessions besides general out-patient services. Evening general out-patient sessions are held at 21 clinics in the more densely populated areas and 11 of them also operate on Sundays and public holidays.

Treatment at a government general out-patient clinic costs \$45 a visit, which includes medicine as well as X-ray examinations, laboratory tests, etc. If the patient requires a specialist's opinion, he is referred to a specialist for

consultation, which costs him \$100 for the first attendance, \$60 for follow-up and \$10 per drug item. If he cannot afford it, the charge is waived. Cases of tuberculosis, leprosy and venereal disease are given free treatment, while maternity and child health guidance, including antenatal and postnatal care of the mother and the entire immunisation programme for the child, is also free.

In 2004, the total number of attendances at government and the HA out-patient clinics were about 7.9 million and 13.2 million respectively. Cases of acute illness and accident casualties are carried by ambulance to the Accident and Emergency Department of Queen Mary Hospital, Ruttonjee Hospital or Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital on Hong Kong Island; St. John Hospital in Cheung Chau; Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Kwong Wah Hospital, Caritas Medical Centre or United Christian Hospital in Kowloon; and Alice Ho Miu Ling Nethersole Hospital, North District Hospital, Princess Margaret Hospital, Prince of Wales Hospital, Tuen Mun Hospital, Tseung Kwan O Hospital or Yan Chai Hospital in the New Territories. Patients are charged \$100 for the emergency treatment.

Patients in the general wards of public hospitals are charged \$50 for the admission fee, \$100 per day occupying acute beds (or \$68 per day occupying non-acute beds) for diet, X-ray examinations, laboratory tests, medicine, and any form of special treatment required, including surgery, radiotherapy, physiotherapy, etc. Again this daily charge may be waived. In 2004, about 1 107 000 were treated in public hospitals.

The HA's Community Nursing Service provides further care to patients discharged from hospitals in their homes.

Private Services: Fees charged by private practitioners in Hong Kong vary, usually from about \$100 to \$250 or more for a specialist consultation. In some cases, these fees include the cost of medicine, but separate charges are often made. Patients also have to pay extra for laboratory tests, X-ray examinations, etc.

As at the end of 2004, there were 12 private hospitals, including the Hong Kong Central Hospital, the Hong Kong Sanatorium and Hospital, the Matilda and War Memorial Hospital and the Union Hospital, all run by private enterprises; and missionary hospitals such as the Canossa, St. Paul's, Baptist, Precious Blood, St. Teresa's, Evangel and two Adventist hospitals.

In 2004, some 227 000 patients were treated in these hospitals. The charges vary from \$320 a day for a bed in a general ward to \$900 or more for a first class ward. Patients have to pay for all services, such as medicines and dressings, besides the daily attendance fees of doctors.

Medical Clinics: Under the Medical Clinics Ordinance, all clinics are required to be re-registered annually. At the end

of 2004, there were 93 registered clinics in the charge of registered medical practitioners, and 77 clinics registered with exemption, making a total of 170. Under the terms of the ordinance, the exempted clinics can continue to employ unregistrable doctors who had, in previous years, satisfied a panel of examiners and were permitted to practise in charity clinics. The medical clinics generally provide low-cost medical care.

Student Health Service: The service, operated by the DH, aims to promote the health of school children. A comprehensive range of promotive and preventive services which cater for the health needs of the students at various stages of their development is provided at the student health service centres. Services include physical examination, health assessment, individual counselling and health education. Students found to have problems will be referred to a special assessment centre or appropriate specialists for further management. At the end of 2004, a total of 12 student health service centres and three special assessment centres have been established to provide services to some 930 000 primary and secondary school students.

Preventive Services: Hong Kong people have continued to enjoy good health, due to the extensive preventive measures implemented by the Government through its Family Health Service, Elderly Health Services, the Port Health Service, the Student Health Service, the School Dental Care Service as well as many other community health services.

At the end of 2004, the DH runs 38 maternal and child health centres where children are given a series of immunisations against nine childhood infectious diseases. Family planning service is also available at a charge of \$1 for every visit.

These preventive services have contributed to Hong Kong's remarkably low infant and maternal mortality rates, which are comparable to the best in the world. They have also kept Hong Kong, one of the most densely populated cities in the world, free from epidemics of major communicable diseases.

Chinese Medicine: The Chinese Medicine Ordinance was passed by the Legislative Council in July 1999 to establish a statutory regulatory framework to control the practice, use, manufacture and trading of Chinese medicine. The regulatory framework will enhance public health protection and greatly improve public confidence in the use of Chinese medicine. Under the Chinese Medicine Ordinance, the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong was set up to be responsible for implementing various regulatory measures.

Beginning in December 2003, the HA set up three Chinese Medicine Clinics in Tung Wah Hospital, Yan Chai Hospital and Alice Ho Miu Ling Nethersole Hospital. Each consultation costs \$120.

Drug Abuse: Of the 14 087 drug abusers reported to the Central Registry of Drug Abuse in 2005, the majority (70%) were abusing heroin, followed by those abusing ketamine (15%) or other narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances. The number of newly reported drug abusers aged under 21 increased by 20% from 1 527 in 2004 to 1 833 in 2005. This represents around 0.2% of the population aged from 11 to 20.

The Government's overall strategy to counter drug trafficking and abuse consists of five main elements: legislation and law enforcement, treatment and rehabilitation, preventive education and publicity, research, and international cooperation.

Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Services: Over the years, Hong Kong has adopted a multi-modality approach

to the provision of drug treatment and rehabilitation services. This approach is necessary because a form of treatment suitable for some drug dependent persons may not be suitable for others, owing to differences in age, history of addiction, personal background, employment and other characteristics.

The main types of treatment programmes for drug dependence include a compulsory placement programme operated by the Correctional Services Department (CSD), a voluntary out-patient methadone treatment programme provided by the DH, and voluntary residential treatment programmes run by non-governmental organisations including Christian therapeutic treatment agencies.

The CSD runs three drug addiction treatment centres, viz, Hei Ling Chau Addiction Treatment Centre and the Annex of Lai Sun Correctional Institution for male addict offenders and Hei Ling Chau Addiction Treatment Centre (Annex) for female addict offenders. In 2005, a total of 1 698 addict offenders were admitted for compulsory drug treatment.

The voluntary methadone treatment programme operated by the DH includes both maintenance and detoxification options for out-patients. Under the more popular maintenance scheme, patients are provided with a dose of methadone each day to block their craving for heroin or opiate. Detoxification aims to wean patients off drugs by gradually reducing their daily dosage of methadone until they are completely drug-free. Social counselling and public health education are provided to all patients, and drug dependent persons seeking help are able to select either type of treatment. At the end of 2005, there were 20 methadone clinics attended by an average of 6 778 patients daily.

Voluntary residential treatment programmes are provided to drug dependent persons to help them rehabilitate from drug addiction and re-integrate into the society. The DH provides subvention to Caritas-Hong Kong, Hong Kong Christian Service and the Society for the Aid and Rehabilitation of Drug Abusers, three non-government organisations, to operate five residential treatment centres. The centres, located in Sai Kung, Tuen Mun, Shek Kwu Chau, Sheung Shui and Yuen Long, provide medical detoxification and rehabilitation services with a total capacity for 376 male drug dependent persons and 42 female drug dependent persons. In addition, the centre operated by Hong Kong Christian Service also provides medical detoxification and rehabilitation out-patient drug treatment service. During 2005, a total of 2 000 patients were admitted for residential treatment and 127 patients attended the out-patient treatment.

The Social Welfare Department (SWD) also provides subvention to five non-government organizations which provide voluntary residential non-medical treatment and rehabilitation programmes. The five organizations are Barnabas Charitable Service Association, Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission — Ling Oi Centre, Operation Dawn, Christian New Being Fellowship and the Society for the Aid and Rehabilitation of Drug Abusers, which in total provide 246 places for drug dependent persons. The length and content of the programmes vary with the five organizations. With a view to assisting the drug abusers, ex-drug abusers and methadone patients to reintegrate into the community and providing counseling and assistance to their families, the SWD provides subvention to two social clubs operated by the Caritas — Hong Kong for drug abusers and ex-drug abusers.

For the treatment of psychotropic substance abusers, subvented counselling services are provided by Caritas HUGS Centre, Hong Kong Christian Service PS33, Cheer Lutheran Centre, Evergreen Lutheran Centre and Tung Wah Group of Hospitals CROSS Centre. There are also five Substance Abuse Clinics established by the Hospital

Authority to provide medical services primarily to psychotropic substance abusers.

Research: Findings from drug-related research studies provide useful reference materials to facilitate the Government's formulation of anti-drug strategies and programmes. During 2005, two studies, one on cognitive impairment and other harmful effects caused by ketamine abuse and the other a 2004 survey of drug use among students, were completed.

The ketamine study provided solid evidence of the drug's harmful effects which included dependence potential, neurocognitive impairment and psychiatric morbidity. The 2004 survey of students concluded that very few secondary level students either took drugs or were exposed to drugs in Hong Kong. There had also been a significant drop in the number of drug-taking students. The proportion of students who had ever abused heroin decreased from 2.6 per cent in 2000 to 1.6 per cent in 2004, while the proportion abusing psychotropic substances fell from 4.1 per cent to 2.7 per cent. The study found that there were significant differences between drug-taking and non-drug-taking students regarding their relationship with family members, attitudes towards drug abuse and self-perception.

There were also two on-going studies, one focused on the harmful effects of cough mixture abuse and the other on the drug abuse situation among ethnic minorities.

Anti-drug Preventive Education and Publicity: Anti-drug preventive education and publicity programmes include drug education at schools, community involvement projects, a variety of publicity and promotional activities through the mass media, and production of education and publicity materials. The Hong Kong Jockey Club Drug InfoCentre (DIC), the first-ever exhibition centre dedicated to drug education in Hong Kong, continued to serve as the platform for promoting anti-drug message to the public. During the year, 34 746 visitors have made use of the facility of DIC.

The Anti-drug Volunteer Group had 135 individual and 91 corporate volunteers. They participated in community and publicity activities to help disseminate anti-drug messages. To sustain drug education for students, the Narcotics Division offered a total of about 662 drug education talks to 84 576 students in 554 primary and secondary schools, schools in the English Schools Foundation and international schools in 2005. Drug talks and seminars were also conducted for 6 765 teachers, social workers, parents and members of uniformed youth groups.