

Our series on the Hospital Authority continues, with *Ella Lee* speaking to the chief of the Hong Kong West Cluster

Queen Mary eyes more profit in private beds

Hong Kong West Cluster
 Hospitals: Queen Mary Hospital, Tsan Yuke Hospital, Duchess of Kent Children's Hospital, Grantham Hospital, Fung Yiu King Hospital, MacLehose Medical Rehabilitation Centre, Tung Wah Hospital
 Population: 530,000
 Number of beds: 3,257
 Bed ratio: six per 1,000 people

Source: Hospital Authority

Queen Mary Hospital hopes to generate an extra \$10 million in profit a year after reorganising its popular private medical services.

Lawrence Lai Fook-ming, chief executive of the Hospital Authority's Hong Kong West Cluster, said the hospital had recently renovated its private wards and redistributed private beds to meet the varying demands of patients.

Queen Mary, the University of Hong Kong's teaching hospital, has been a popular choice for patients seeking private consultation from the university's medical experts. Private doctors also refer patients to the hospital for many specialised services.

The authority has some 300 private beds, of which about a third fall under the cluster. Queen Mary alone has 84 private beds. The daily rate for a first-class private bed is \$3,900, while that for a second-class private bed is \$2,600.

The hospital has borrowed \$10 million from the Hospital Authority to renovate its private wards. Among improvements is the installation of LCD televisions. The project will be completed by June.

Dr Lai said private beds in some specialities, such as obstetrics and gynaecology, had been underused, while there was a shortage of private beds for general purposes. After the redistribution, the number of general private beds will rise from 35 to 63, though the total number of private beds will not change.

The cluster is seeking government approval for the introduction of packaged private rehabilitation services at the MacLehose Medical Rehabilitation Centre. Queen Mary will also set up a private pharmacy for patients to buy their own drugs under the authority's new drug formulary.

"We want to have a reliable source of medicine for our patients, so that, after consultations at the hospital, they do not need to look for a pharmacy to buy the medicine. It will also be a new source of revenue for us," Dr Lai said.



Lawrence Lai Fook-ming outside Queen Mary Hospital. Any increased focus on private services at the hospital will not affect the quality of public care, says the Hong Kong West Cluster chief. Photo: Martin Chan

He said the renovations and redistribution of beds would create an extra \$10 million profit in 2006/07.

He said the hospital would not use public funds to subsidise private services. "While providing private services, we will recover the cost and will not compromise the services to the public."

Authority chairman Anthony Wu Ting-yuk earlier said the body wanted to redistribute some private beds from underused hospitals to popular ones. Dr Lai said

Queen Mary was ready to open more private beds if the authority allowed it to do so.

"Not many hospitals have private beds and, in general, patients in our cluster are relatively better off, so we have reason to believe that there will be enough patients if we expand our private services," he said.

He said Queen Mary did not have plans to become a private hospital or to provide private medical services in a "high profile" way. "We are not competing with the private hospitals, we just want to meet the rising demand from patients, and to generate extra income."

But the president of the Hong

Kong Medical Association, Choi Kin, warned that the authority would jeopardise its public services if it continued to expand its private services.

"While all the top doctors are treating private patients, most of them are the well-off. Naturally, the poorer public patients can only be seen by junior doctors. The private services will end up becoming a product for the wealthy," he said.

Dr Lai said the 69-year-old hospital's ageing facilities had been limiting the development of new services.

The hospital is building a new trauma centre, which will be put into service by the end of the year.

DOCTORS ASKED TO RETURN PART-TIME TO PUBLIC SECTOR

Top surgeons who have left the Hospital Authority for private practice are being asked to work in public hospitals on a part-time basis.

Queen Mary Hospital has suffered from the departure of several top surgeons in the past few years, including specialists in cardiac surgery, liver transplants and breast surgery.

Since 2003, six consultants and 26 senior medical officers from the hospital have quit. Last year was the worst, with 13 senior medical officers resigning - 15 per cent of the hospital's 87 such staff.

Lawrence Lai Fook-ming, chief executive of the Hospital Authority's Hong Kong West Cluster, denied there was a brain drain, saying competent doctors were filling the posts.

He said the hospital planned to create more part-time consultant posts, for former doctors now in private practice to work for several sessions each week. At present, there are four such consultants.

"The departure of some experienced doctors has affected some of our services. In some cases, we ask the consultants to work part time for us, so they can help maintain services and train new blood," he said.

Dr Lai denied poor morale had led to the departures, saying they were the result of natural turnover, the rate of which was about 6 per cent last year.

At present, there are about 4,600 doctors working for the Hospital Authority. Ella Lee

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

OBITUARY

PADMA L. GIDWANI, beloved Wife of Lilaram P. Gidwani, Mother of Rajesh L. Gidwani, Deepak L. Gidwani, Sunita M. Manghnani, Mother-in-law of Rani R. Gidwani, Manoj G. Manghnani, Urvashi D. Gidwani, Grandmother of Sanya, Esha, Raina, Meher and Saachi, Sister-in-law of Late Lekhray P. Gidwani, Kaushliya L. Gidwani, Late Kishni T. Changrani, Chellaram P. Gidwani, Late Keka C. Gidwani and Late Tikan C. Pagarani, Aunt of Chandiram L., & Devi Gidwani and Ramesh & Mona Changrani, passed away peacefully for her heavenly abode on 29th April, 2006. May Almighty God rest her soul in eternal peace.

Funeral Services will be held on Tuesday, 2nd May, 2006 at Hong Kong Funeral Home, 679 King's Road, North Point, Hong Kong, followed by cremation service at Cape Collinson Crematorium. Buses will depart at 1:15pm from both City Hall on Hong Kong Island and Middle Road in TST.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The family of the late **WILLIAM LAM (林家聰)** wish to express their deep gratitude to all their relatives and friends for the generous support at the time of their bereavement. Their kind expressions of sympathy, floral tributes, messages of condolences, generous donations to Kingsway China Education Foundation and attendance at the funeral service are gratefully acknowledged.



Annemarie Evans

Gordon Oldham's grandson was two years old last month. His grandfather was in London to celebrate the event, having vowed he will never miss his two grandsons' birthdays.

They are not the only youngsters in Mr Oldham's life. The others include those that sang to him when he came up a hill in Nepal and, smiling, threw a garland round his neck when the Child Welfare Scheme in the troubled Himalayan nation, which Mr Oldham chairs, opened a new clinic.

"I get very emotional about it," said the 54-year-old lawyer, adventurer and charity worker - who two years ago took part in a Sahara marathon "because it was there".

"We walked along the valley and they started singing and rushing down to greet us. The kids and the parents were so delighted to have this centre," he recalls, sitting in his law firm's office in Central.

Mr Oldham has been involved with the charity since 1998 and has made many trips to Nepal.

So far the Child Welfare Scheme - founded by Briton Douglas MacLagan in 1995 and which has bases in London and Hong Kong - has helped 11 mountain villages build and manage day-care health centres.



Gordon Oldham's charity improves lives in Nepal. "I get very emotional about it," he says. Photo: Dustin Shum

The charity has also set up drinking water projects and established programmes to build smokeless stoves in many village houses.

"It takes the smoke out of the houses and cuts down on pulmonary complaints," said Mr Oldham.

The recent strife in Nepal, with huge demonstrations against King Gyanendra's rule, has seriously disrupted the charity's work. While the situation has eased somewhat, the work of the clinics was affected by curfews, with staff unable to get to work and children unable to travel for treatment.

Many of the villages are depopulated, with young men and boys

having left for the towns to avoid being recruited or harassed by Maoist rebels or the army.

During the recent demonstrations, street children were imprisoned, and two children were arbitrarily chosen and taken away by the army from one of the charity's centres, to be returned - beaten up - two days later, Mr Oldham said.

While he is happy to support the cause and also enjoys hiking in the Himalayas, he balks at the word "epiphany" for what he experienced through his work with the Child Welfare Scheme.

He said: "I thought, you know what, Gordon, you're not a plumber, and you're not a builder. But

what I can do is swim with the crocodiles and sharks and do business in Hong Kong." And through that, he raises funds.

When he is not working as a corporate and commercial lawyer, Mr Oldham is off adventuring.

"In July I'm doing the Atacama desert in Chile.

"We're running 240km - it will be like doing a marathon a day for the sheer hell of it. I really like pushing myself."

The Child Welfare Scheme will be holding a "Funkraiser" - featuring Nude, plus DJs Simon Pang and Steve Bruce at LLY, 1/F, LKF Tower Central. All proceeds to the charity. Friday, May 12, 8pm. \$150

Lawyer with a taste for adventure pours energies into helping kingdom

CITY BRIEFS

SHENZHEN POLICE BEAT US, SAY HK ROBBERY VICTIMS

Three Hong Kong residents, who were robbed and then arrested in Shenzhen after they fought with their robbers, returned to the city yesterday. The victims, aged between 22 and 27, were confronted by three robbers at 7pm on Sunday. The younger man was assaulted by the three, who tried to steal his mobile phone and \$2,000. His friends fought with the robbers and, when Shenzhen police arrived, both groups were arrested for fighting.

The Hong Kong men said they were beaten in police custody and were made to sign a document promising they would not pursue further action. They were released on Sunday night and sent to a Shenzhen hospital for treatment. They arrived at the Lok Ma Chau checkpoint at about 2am yesterday and were taken to North District Hospital for checkups.

POLICE NEGOTIATORS TALK DOWN SUICIDAL LOVER

Police negotiators persuaded a suicidal man to come down from the roof of a residential block in Wan Chai after a three-hour standoff. Emergency crews were called when the 29-year-old man threatened to jump off Man Hee Mansion in Johnston Road just before midnight on Sunday. The man's 23-year-old girlfriend told police he had gone to the roof after a dispute with her over their relationship.

In a separate incident, a 48-year-old man with a history of mental illness plunged to his death from the roof of Hong Kong Mansion in Yee Wo Street, Causeway Bay, at 9.45am. He worked as a cleaner at the building and lived with his elderly mother in Yuen Long.