



HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT

IS HKD\$500M CASH INFUSION A COLD COMFORT TO OUR “MEDICAL WARRIORS”?

Lawmaker Joseph Lee urged government to face the root of the problem



Public hospital bed occupancy situation. Photo: Hospital Authority

Lawmaker Joseph Lee, chairman of the Associate of Hong Kong Nursing Staff, blasted the government during an interview on RTHK's radio programme “Letter to Hong Kong”, after the announcement of the HK\$500 million one-off extra funding for Hong Kong public hospitals was made on January 30.

Clara Ip

“The Food and Health Bureau should shoulder up the responsibility of monitoring the implementation process”, Lee said. He also underscored that a report on the utilisation of the emergency fund in the Hospital Authority should be submitted to the Chief Executive.

Frustration flares for manpower shortage in public hospitals, both nurses and hospital supporting staff protested on January 20 and January 30 respectively. So, the Chief Executive Carrie Lam announced the allocation of an extra fund of HKD 500 million to the Hospital Authority to resolve the problem.

As Hong Kong entered the winter surge period, the overall public hospital bed occupancy rate has reached over 107 per cent. Extra beds congested along the ward corridors. The waiting time in the Accident and Emergency Department exceeded eight hours.

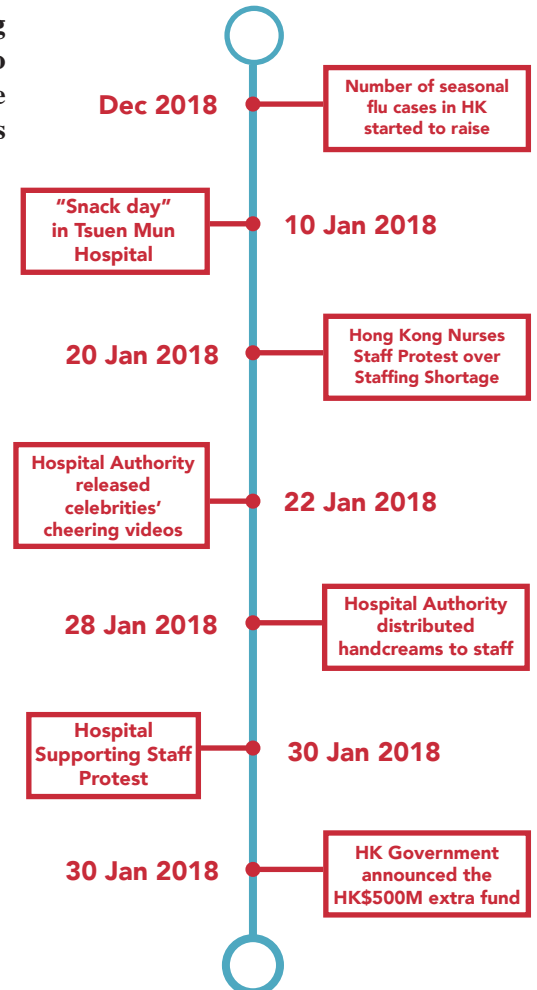
The Hospital Authority coordinated a series of cheering events to express gratitude and

revive their spirits. They held the “snack day” in Tsuen Mun Hospital, distributed hand cream and invited six celebrities to film short clips.

But, the Hospital Authority was rebuked by the medical staff and the public for such actions. Lawmaker Rebecca Chan described senior management in Hospital Authority as “detached from the reality” even they have a good intention.

It is estimated that the shortage percentage of nurses will reach up to 3.3 per cent in 2030, according to the Report of the Strategic Review on Healthcare Manpower Planning and Professional Development. The Hospital Authority has spent HK\$70 million on hiring agency nurses last year to remediate the situation. The Associate of Hong Kong Nursing Staff has conducted a survey showing that more than 70 per cent of respondents disagreed that bringing in more agency nurses could ameliorate the condition.

“The turnover rate [of agency nurses] are



Hong Kong Winter Surge Timeline. Graph: Clara Ip

too high whereas it increases my workload to provide training for them”, Chan, a nurse from Queen Elizabeth Hospital, said. She also added that some of retired agency nurses’ experience is not up to date and their standard varies.

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Agency nurses are not able to distribute medicine and do wound dressing since they have no access right to medical records.

Cheung, Nurse from United Christian Hospital

A case reported that two care assistants and one nurse are responsible for more than 50 patients per night in a hospital ward, according to a representative from the Hong Kong Medical and Health Care Staff General Union.

Considering that the international nurse-to-patient ratio is 1:6, the situation in Hong Kong is getting far less favourable. It has raised from 1:12 in 2015 to 1:24 in 2019, according to the data from the Association of Hong Kong Nursing Staff. It is warned that a higher nurse-to-patient ratio will cause a higher risk for patient health.

The government proposed to increase the number of admission intake for local institutions in nursing studies in the following years. For long-term planning, 120 places will

be added within these four years. The total number of University Grants Committee-funded Universities for nursing students will increase from 630 to 690 places and 690 to 750 places in 2019-2020 and 2022-2023 academic year respectively.



Public hospital supporting staff protest against manpower shortage. Photo: Felix Wong.