HA is Committed to Providing Comprehensive Follow-up Services for SARS Patients

The Hospital Authority (HA) has been very concerned with the physical and psychological well-being of recovered Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) patients and is committed to providing comprehensive and long-term care for the patients to ensure and enhance their functional and psychosocial wellness.

The HA spokesman today (Thursday, 6 November) said that all discharged SARS patients who had clinical needs and symptoms are already being followed up and treated at respective hospitals. During the initial months upon discharge from hospital, recovered SARS patients were followed up by their attending doctors in respective clinics. Furthermore, they have been invited to undergo an assessment of their physical and psychological condition.

Those who were assessed to require rehabilitation have been enrolled in physical and psychological programmes. A total of 115 patients have received in-patient pulmonary rehabilitation in Wong Tai Sin Hospital. Furthermore, over 1,300 patients have been followed up in respective specialist clinics for medicine and orthopaedics, among whom 428 patients have been referred to receive pulmonary day rehabilitation. So far, around 70 percent of the day rehabilitation patients have restored normal function.

For those recovered SARS patients with bone or joint symptoms, assessment and treatment have been provided basing on clinical needs. On the other hand, HA will also provide check up for asymptomatic patients to take care of their potential problems. While entering into the period of sixth to ninth months after discharge, a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) screening of the hip and knee joints will be provided to all asymptomatic patients.
So far a total of 1,200 SARS patients have been contacted. Among them 418 have received MRI screening, with 49 of them showing avascular necrosis (AVN), while 28 of them are detected in the hip joint. All patients will be treated and managed according to established clinical protocols. Medical literature reveals that some patients with AVN would recover naturally following a period of observation, while some would recover after undergoing a de-compression procedure on the hip joint. The option of hip joint replacement operation for more serious patients would be considered when clinically indicated. Thorough discussion will be held with the patients for the best option of treatment.

The spokesman said psychosocial support was considered very important and also provided to recovered SARS patients as appropriate. Some 1,400 sets of questionnaire were sent out in July 2003 to all discharged patients, among them around 100 patients have been followed up by clinical psychologists. By now only 40 of them have to be actively followed up. Furthermore, medical social workers also followed up some 700 patients to provide them appropriate social support.

The HA spokesman said, “To facilitate the overall coordination of the follow-up programme, six nurses will be designated as coordinators of the programme for the hospital clusters (Hong Kong Island [to cover Hong Kong East and Hong Kong West], Kowloon East [to cover Kowloon East and Kowloon Central], Kowloon West, New Territories East, New Territories West) as well as for HA Head Office. They will be responsible for coordinating the logistics of the screening protocol, communication with patients, and the proper collection of clinical data.”

“A total of 12 Post SARS Clinics (PSCs) have been set up. The clinician in-charge of PSC will ensure appropriate clinical attention and care is given to post-SARS patients in consultation with designated MRI radiologists, orthopaedic surgeons, clinical psychologists and medical social workers. Follow up services will also cover the patients who were classified as suspected SARS patients according to the definition of the World Health Organisation and have been treated with steriods.”

The HA will establish a hotline service – 2300 6393 from tomorrow (Friday, 7 November 2003) for recovered SARS patients to enquire on their medical related needs. The hotline will be manned by health care professionals during office hours from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm from Monday to Friday, and from 9:00 am to 12 noon on Saturday. People who call after office hours and in public holidays can leave their message and will be followed up in the first working day.

The HA spokesman reiterates that HA is very concerned with the well-being of recovered SARS patients, and is committed to providing appropriate medical, rehabilitative and psychosocial support they need.

* * * * * * *