

\$1,000 fee proposed for extra comforts

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PEOPLE who desire added privacy, convenience and comfort while in hospital will have to pay \$1,000 a day for the privilege if the Government follows recommendations issued yesterday by the Health and Medical Development Advisory Committee.

Committee chairman Professor Natalis Yuen Chung-lau said it was appropriate that extra benefits were made available to patients who could afford them.

"If people want a little more privacy, a television or other added benefits, it is only fair they should be able to have these extras if they pay for them," he said.

"We propose that patients pay a flat rate of \$1,000 for semi-private rooms. This fee should be inclusive, with no itemised charges added on."

He said the committee believed the current regime of health care charges was not totally fair and certain options outlined in the Gov-

ernment Green Paper, "Towards Better Health", were worth pursuing.

"There is no doubt those who can afford to pay more need to bear a larger percentage of the cost of medical services. This being the case, we support the option of gradually increasing the per day cost of using a hospital bed from two per cent to five per cent of operating costs," Professor Yuen said.

"We believe a gradual increase from \$43 per day for a hospital bed to \$105 over a number of years is reasonable. However, we are against a drastic increase, and while there is no timetable we would be disappointed if the cost went to \$105 per day this year.

"However, it would be reasonable to expect the price to increase to three per cent of operating costs, or \$63 per day, before the end of this year."

He assured the public no one would miss out on health care because it was too expensive.

"No one should be deprived of medical care and we fully support a fee waiver

system for groups identified as being in need.

"People receiving public assistance should benefit from a total waiver of hospital fees.

"It is also appropriate for a partial waiver to be granted to the elderly, unemployed and chronically ill long-term patients," Professor Yuen said.

Meanwhile, almost three quarters of people in a survey were opposed to the Government's proposal to peg hospital bed fees to operating costs, a survey has found.

Most people were opposed to any increase in bed fees, said Dr Lo Chi-keung, of the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB), which conducted the telephone survey.

The DAB asked 500 randomly selected households for their views on the proposals to alter the system of medical fees made in the consultation document on health released last month.

About 60 per cent of respondents said they used the public health system for economic reasons.