

/\$2 million/ plan to hire sick beds

THE MEDICAL and Health Department is considering using more than \$2 million to hire 62 first and second class beds in the British Military Hospital and to expand the pathology service of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in the next financial year.

The proposal, if approved by the Finance Committee, will help to cut down overcrowding at other government hospitals.

Under the new defence agreement, the number of employees of the British garrison here will be greatly cut down the occupancy at the military hospital is expected to decrease.

Under the proposed scheme, \$2,073,000 will be required to cover the cost of the hired beds at £11 per day on the basis of 75 per cent occupancy of the 62 beds expected to be available.

Another \$19,000 will be used in connection with services at the hospital and a further \$27,000 is for pathology equipment. The amounts will be reserved in the General Warrant until proposals have been accepted.

In return, the department is expected to receive \$457,000 in respect of charges for the patients using the hired beds.

Urban Councillor Denny Huang said charges for the hired beds should be set at a level which will cover the operation cost.

As the first and second class beds usually catered for the better-off patients it will be unreasonable for the authorities to use the public money to subsidise these beds, he said.

Unlike the general wards, used mainly by poor people, charges for private rooms must be high enough to cover the expenses.

Another civic leader Dr L.K. Ding welcomed the proposal and said it is a reasonable step to solve the problem of the shortage of hospital beds.

The Princess Margaret Hospital will be fully operational soon after next month. It will provide a total of 1,350 beds in all specialities, and help to ease some of the workload at Queen Elizabeth Hospital.