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200pc rise for private wards plan

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A proposal to raise fees by more than 200 per cent for private wards in Government hospitals is likely to be submitted to the Executive Council in the next few months despite its earlier rejection.

And a source inside the Health and Welfare Branch of the Government Secretariat appeared confident that the proposal will be pushed through.

If approval is given, fees for first- and second-class beds will be increased from \$240 to \$750 and \$160 to \$500 respectively.

It was learned that the proposal submitted last month was subsequently rejected as some executive councillors were querying the drastic rise.

The source said the new proposal would be "basically the same" as the rejected one.

"We hope that the decision will be taken before the end of the year," she said.

Referring to the previous rejection, the source said

"The Executive Council basically did not agree with the proposal."

And the obstacle then was not limited to technical problems, she admitted.

At present, Government private wards include 49 single-person bedrooms and 172 two-to-six-patients bedrooms with daily charges of \$240 and \$160 respectively.

It was understood that the present fee for a first-class bed was based on cost while that of a second-class bed was "slightly" lower.

This meant that second-class bed patients have been subsidised by the community which according to the same source "does not seem reasonable" because they can afford to pay.

She said the philosophy for the proposed increase is that the full cost should be charged for second-class private wards.

At present, civil servants normally occupy about 75 per cent of all private wards.

Another factor to back the proposal was that only a very small number of beds would be affected, she said.

As for first-class patients, the thinking was that they would be enjoying the privacy of a single-person bedroom.

"Privacy is a very costly commodity," the source said.

But even after the rise, Government hospital wards will still be cheaper than those in private hospitals.

"It is difficult to make an exact case to case comparison between private and Government hospitals.

"But we are basically confident that fees for Government beds will still be lower than those of private hospitals," she said.

At present, accommodation, food, basic medical care and drugs, routine laboratory and investigation, physiological and occupational therapy are covered under the fees for private wards in Government hospitals.

Only special treatment such as medical consultation and operations requires extra charges.