

\$80m equipment boost to cheer local cancer patients

MORE than \$80 million will be spent during the next five years on eight sets of sophisticated radio-therapy equipment to treat cancer patients in Hongkong's hospitals.

Installation of the machines - each costing \$10 million - will bring the number of linear accelerators in Hongkong to 18 and significantly boost the territory's cancer-treatment capability.

Only three public hospitals - Queen Elizabeth, Queen Mary and the Prince of Wales - are equipped with these specialised, radio-active facilities which treat an average of 6,000 patients a year.

A few hundred other patients receive radio-therapy in the territory's private hospitals.

Medical and health offi-

cials told a Legislative Council working group that they envisaged Tuen Mun and Lady Yonde district hospitals being equipped with three linear accelerators.

Queen Elizabeth Hospital, which has four, will be given two more.

The purchase scheme has been drawn up in anticipation of the rising number of elderly people in the territory.

Cancer remains the number one killer in Hongkong, claiming the lives of about 7,000 people each year - during which period about 13,300 new cases are identified.

A cancer patient usually has to wait one or two days for a medical consultation. Subsequent radio-therapy treatment can be arranged within about two weeks.

There are 58 doctors specialising in cancer and tumour treatment working at public hospitals - three short of the figure recommended by the Medical Development Advisory Committee.

Dr Chiu Hin-kwong, who heads the councillors' working group on health services, said the figures suggested that medical services for cancer patients in Hongkong are adequate.

Radio-therapy services for these patients are heavily subsidised by the Government.

A patient has to pay only \$180 for the 10-session radio-therapy treatment, which in real terms usually costs about \$19,000.

The same \$18-a-prescription rate also applies to chemo-therapy.