

\$50m hospital project too late, board warns

By FIONA CHAN

SHA TIN's hard-pressed Prince of Wales Hospital is to undergo a \$50 million expansion to provide more maternity and specialist facilities.

Despite the news, the Sha Tin District Board's health committee yesterday said the shortage of facilities for the area would not be resolved if more Vietnamese boat people arrived and the district population continued to soar.

After meeting the district board committee, Director of Hospital Services Mr Chau Tuen-yin said the expansion project would start next January.

Four more maternity delivery suites will be introduced, taking the total up to 14.

The project, expected to be completed in January 1993, also includes expansion

of office accommodation and specialist clinics.

The Prince of Wales serves about one million people in the Eastern New Territories and caters for the Whitehead detention centre which has more than 22,000 boat people.

Spokesman for the committee Mr Johnston Wong Hong-chung said the project could not satisfy the increasing demand for hospital services in the near future.

"It will be too late even if the new phase of the hospital starts now," said Mr Wong.

He expected more Vietnamese boat people would arrive in the territory in the coming sailing season.

He called on the Government to maintain the existing number of boat people in the detention centre and transfer more Vietnamese pregnant women to other hospitals.

About 18 per cent of the obstetric cases at Prince of Wales last year were Vietnamese, with 2,785 Vietnamese women giving birth there. The paediatric department catered to 951 Vietnamese children - 9.8 per cent of its total admission.

Mr Wong said the Government did not fairly distribute its medical resources, as was revealed by the small ratio of doctors to residents in the New Territories - only 1½ to 1,000 compared with 3.8 to 1,000 in Kowloon.

"At the Prince of Wales we have only got four eye specialists. Because of our large population, we should have six or seven."

Mr Chau said the setting up of two hospitals in Tai Po between 1994 and 1995 and the new hospital in North District would alleviate the Prince of Wales' burden.