

# \$400m sought for hospital computers

By JAMES RILEY

THE Hospital Authority will seek \$400 million from the Government during the next three years to fund the first stage of an ambitious computerisation programme, its chief development officer, Mr Pang Siew-man, said.

Covering the 37 public hospitals that come under the control of the authority on December 1, the Integrated Hospital Information System will be one of the largest single computer projects undertaken in Hongkong.

It will be implemented in three stages during the next six to eight years.

Mr Pang said the massive capital requirement of the computerisation programme was because information technology in government hospitals had been badly neglected in the past compared with other government agencies.

"Whether we get the money we ask for or not, we don't know, but we are putting a very strong case to the Government," he said.

"I think they accept the system that we've put forward is absolutely essential to get us up and going.

"The investment has got to be made now; it probably should have been five or 10 years ago."

There was no substantial information technology systems in place in any govern-

ment hospital, Mr Pang said.

Expertise in the application of information technology in the health care sector was extremely limited, and a major component of the new project would be staff training, he said.

Despite an apparent austerity drive, government spending on information technology has risen dramatically in recent years.

Excluding spending on personal computers and non-administrative systems, government expenditure on information technology for 1990-91 was almost \$850 million. This compares with about \$421 million for the previous year.

Including personal computers and non-administrative systems, total government spending in the last financial year is estimated at \$1.1 billion.

Government sources say that while spending for 1991-92 will remain at about \$1.1 billion, a dramatic increase is expected for 1992-93 as design work for the Port and Airport Development Strategy starts in earnest.

The Hospital Authority received final funding approval for \$26 million allocated to information technology for the 1991-92 financial year.

That money will be spent on upgrading the IBM 3090 mainframe at Princess Margaret Hospital, which will act as the authority's first data centre.

The authority plans to build a second data centre at a Hongkong Island hospital next year to expand the system capacity and to act as a back-up and disaster recovery site.

The first applications to be built into the overall information system will include a patient index, an admission, discharge and transfer system, data on outpatients and a laboratory management system.

Other applications include management systems such as billing and revenue collection, human resources and materials management.

A priority for the authority will be the design and implementation of a payroll system.

Payrolls are currently handled by the Treasury Department, which has given the Hospital Authority until mid-1993 to have its own system in place.

Mr Pang said the authority expected that the software for a payroll and human resources system would cost about \$30 million.

He said the authority's information technology strategy would help it achieve its aim of decentralising management of hospitals.

While major databases are to be centralised at the two mainframe sites, hospitals will have their own processing capacity, which should mean greater flexibility in managing their own affairs.