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An uphill task for Tungwah chief

It is a somewhat daunting task that lies ahead for the new chairman of the Tungwah Group of Hospitals, Mr Aloysius Chu.

Chu is in the driver's seat of Hongkong's largest welfare institution heading for what is likely to be a sort of love-hate relationship with the government.

On the one hand he will be wooing hundreds of millions of dollars to pay for a 10-year growth plan (how would you like to be convinced of the need for a \$49 million laundry?)

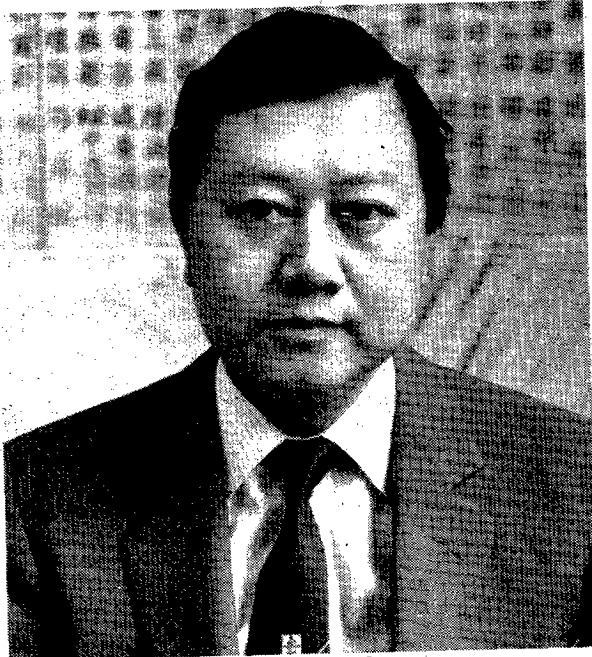
And on the other he will be defending a cornerstone of the group's service to which government accountants are turning a jaundiced eye — free hospital beds.

The board is also considering increasing the cost of other beds which could spark considerable public concern.

Add to that the virtually full-time job of running the day-to-day activities of a wide range of medical and educational institutions employing more than 6,000 people, and you might wonder why he wants to do the job, especially as it is unpaid.

He answers: "Hongkong is a unique place. We don't have social benefits. We don't have a national health plan. So that's why my predecessors started this hospital.

"So you need people to run it. It's an organisation which looks after the general public and it's very good social work."



MR Chu ... in the driver's seat.

Chu heads an honorary board of 20 directors and though it is newly elected every year, there are only eight new faces for 1985-86 because, as the complexity of the group has grown, so has the need for continuation within the board.

Chu joined the board seven years ago shortly after he started his own firm of solicitors. He trained assistants to run the firm so he could devote more time to the Tungwah group.

The government provides 90 per cent of the group's funding. The remaining 10 per cent comes from public

donations.

However, Chu explained that it was the board which makes policy decisions, though it works closely with the Medical Health Department.

The group uses the support from the public to defend its free beds policy and cited the marked increase in that support over the years as proof that people approved it.

Chu inherits the work of consulting the government on the ambitious 10-year development plan.

"Most of it is an extension of existing services and I

would not single out any project.

"Almost all our medical services are in great demand — it is a matter of saying we cannot offer so much at this point in time so this is why we are planning to expand our services.

"People are demanding more and the machines we were able to use three years ago may not be suitable for patients today and we have to improve to bring us in line with the present," he said.

One project contained in the plan is already under construction — the \$44 million Ophthalmic Centre in Tungwah Eastern Hospital.

Computerisation of the medical section's administration is being actively processed by the government and is expected to be ready in a few months, Chu said.

Chu is seeking approval for a centralised laundry at the Wongtatsin infirmary to replace the existing "old and inadequate" laundry equipment and service the group's five hospitals without having to rely on private firms.

Also included within the plan is the refurbishing of seven patients' day rooms at Wongtatsin infirmary.

Three wards at Tungwah Hospital may be set up as an eye, nose, throat and ophthalmology unit, a neurology unit and an oncology (cancer) unit linked to the Queen Mary Hospital.

There are several very large, though less imminent, projects in the plan. These are:

- A \$20 million outpatient department extension at the Kwongwah Hospital.

- A \$50 million redevelopment of the Pingyanchong Convalescent Hospital in Sandy Bay.

- A \$40 million redevelopment of Yanyan building, Tungwah Hospital, to provide more comprehensive paramedical services.

Chu could come under government pressure to end the availability of third class (free) beds and an increase both in the number and the cost of first and second class beds is being considered.

Chu said he did not know if free beds were to end but gave the views of the board.

"We feel that as we started off as a free hospital we think this is one of the traditions we should respect. We really want to maintain some free beds for people who cannot afford to pay.

"We are considering increasing the number of paying beds and, at the same time, increase the fees but we haven't decided on details. We are waiting for some feedback from the medical division and we expect this very soon.

"We have to be reasonable because one of the arguments the government uses is that it is the taxpayers' money and if we can use less then the taxpayers pay less.

"As far as we are concerned public opinion is most important. A large part of our donations comes from the general public and for the past three years this has been on the increase," he said.

In 1982-83 this was \$8.8 million and last year \$16.65 million. The board sees this as public support for its policies.

"Personally I think the matter rests on the system HK's society has. We are not like England or Australia where people enjoy social benefits. I am sure this is why the government feels we should exist and we are working hand in hand to provide the best services to the public of Hongkong," he said.

Meanwhile, the board hopes to maintain its links with Beijing, forged after two delegations went there last year as guests of the Ministry of Civic Affairs (the equivalent of Hongkong's Welfare Department).

The board has extended an invitation to the Chinese to visit their group of hospitals and are now awaiting a reply.