

'\$14m is needed' for ambulances'

19.2

By Agnes Lam

THE Government would have to spend \$14 million to upgrade and provide efficient ambulance services, the Chief Ambulance Officer, Mr Pang Tak-sum, said yesterday.

This was the amount that would be needed to implement all the recommendations in the British consultancy report on the ambulance service, he said.

The Government committed itself to improving ambulance services when the Secretary for Security, Mr David Jeaffreson, told the Legislative Council last week that it would implement the recommendations if resources were available.

Yesterday, Mr Pang told *The Standard* he did not expect any difficulty implementing the recommendations.

"Some of the proposals have already been carried out," he said.

As an example, he said ambulances had already achieved the recommended 10-minute

travelling time in the urban areas.

Mr Pang said that to maintain the target, the Government would have to spend an additional \$7.4 million on staff and maintenance each year.

He regarded the sum as "just a little amount" when compared with the annual \$103 million in the recurrent costs of the ambulance service.

Although the consultancy report recommended 30-minute travelling time for ambulances in the rural areas, Mr Pang said 71 percent of the calls had been met in 20 minutes.

The remaining calls, which came mainly from very remote areas, would have to be met within 30 minutes as recommended, he said.

The ambulance division is now collecting information on the location of the calls in rural areas.

"We hope to analyse the data

to identify the locations of the most frequent calls to facilitate better allocation of resources," Mr Pang said.

The consultancy report, which cost \$1.1 million, also suggested that the Fire Services Department build more ambulance depots in the next few years at the rate of two or three each year.

Mr Pang said there were plans to build more depots already — three to be built next year in Junk Bay, Yuen Long and Tsuen Wan. Another two would be built in Tsim Sha Tsui and Wong Tai Sin in 1990.

By 1991, the department will have four new depots located in Ma On Shan, Sha Tin, Tin Shui Wai and Ho Man Tin.

Mr Pang said there would be a marked improvement in ambulance services with the coming onstream of these new depots.

In another move to improve the service, the Government also plans to provide direct communication links between ambulances and hospitals by 1991.

Plans also are in hand to air-condition all ambulances within three years. More than half the present ambulance fleet is air-conditioned.