



UCH is a hospital without walls

United Christian Hospital boosts geriatric care amidst rapid ageing in Hong Kong

The hospital eyes further expansion amidst apparent shortage in manpower and facilities, and remains committed to responding to the rapidly ageing population in its territory.

The 1,400-bed United Christian Hospital (UCH) serves over 400,000 patients a year—a volume that has put a strain on its resources. The hospital provides 24-hour accident and emergency, in-patient, out-patient, and community care services. It also provides geriatric day hospital, physiotherapy, psychiatry, and radiology services at the Yung Fung Memorial Centre, manages the pharmacy service of the Pamela Youde Polyclinic, and administers primary care services through five general out-patient clinics in the Kowloon East region.

Despite the challenges, **Dr. Chui Tak-yi**, hospital chief executive, remains resolute in steering the hospital into the future. “UCH strives to manage service pressure areas through rationalisation and prioritisation,” he said, highlighting that UCH is actively taking steps to meet the ever growing demand for quality healthcare.

“Hospital without walls”

Founded through a partnership between the Hong Kong Christian Council and the Alice HoMiu Ling Nethersole Hospital, UCH first opened its doors in 1973. It became a public hospital in 1991, with the Hospital Authority taking over its administration. With its motto “With Christian Love We Care, With Excellence We Serve,” UCH seeks to provide holistic care for patients and promote the concept

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of “hospital without walls” through community-oriented partnerships and services. Pioneering community nursing services in the 1970s, UCH nurses reached out to communities and extended direct clinical care services across a wide range of specialties, such as geriatrics, surgery, and postnatal care.

Geriatric care

Responding to the rapidly ageing population within its immediate vicinity, UCH established an Ortho-Geri Specialty Ward in November 2015—the first hospital in Hong Kong to do so. Kwun Tong, the district where the hospital is located, is one of Hong Kong’s poorest, with people aged 60 and above comprising a fourth of its population.

Dr. Chui relates that their Orthopaedics and Traumatology (O&T) department handles an average of 600 cases of geriatric hip fracture every year, necessitating the need for specialized geriatric services. “We aim at enhancing pre-operative management to ensure operation will be done within 48 hours, as well as in improving post-operative care, rehabilitation, and discharge,” he said. The Ortho-Geri Specialty Ward incorporates several elderly-friendly features, using warm colours for different cubicles, bigger and more readable signage, and



Space and manpower shortage is not holding UCH back

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and the number of operation rooms in the outpatient clinic from 81 to 180.

The new ambulatory block will house the expanded specialist outpatient clinics, and day and rehabilitation services. It will also provide additional space to the coronary care unit, intensive care unit, radiology department, accident and emergency department, and the endoscopy centre. A new Oncology Centre will also be constructed within the building, designed to provide one-stop services including radiotherapy, chemotherapy, and psychosocial care for cancer patients. The strategic framework behind UCH's expansion is CARE, or the enhancement of Cancer, Ambulatory, Rehabilitation, and Emergency Services. Aside from the new ambulatory block, the older blocks will either be demolished or refurbished, and landscaping and road works will also be commenced.

Workforce development

Dr. Chui stresses that another focus area for improvement is the development of the hospital's employees. "A more stable workforce is to be attained through continuation of career development opportunities for the staff," he said. He highlights the crucial role the medical staff play in interfacing with patients, and underscored the need to develop a system that would enhance their skills and core competencies. While the large-scale expansion is ongoing, Dr. Chui also said the hospital would try to minimize disruption to its operations.

"The key to achieve this is through close monitoring of the works, and continuous communication with staff, patients, stakeholders, and community partners," he said, emphasizing that the hospital will remain "functional at all times," and that they have been very proactive in mitigating all risks related to the expansion project. In the short term, Dr. Chui says UCH is readying for the annual increase in demand in acute services during the winter surge. "With the aging population, high demand for accident and emergency elderly patients requiring medical care is anticipated," he said.

specially-designed toilet doors to allow fast access in times of emergency. The increasing volume in UCH's patients has created several problems, with long queuing periods primary among them.

To address this and improve convenience for patients, the hospital developed the Specialist Out-Patient Clinic Queue Management System (SOPC-QMS), which provides real-time announcements of the consultation timeslot being served and displays it on waiting areas. The system also automatically updates queue status, which helps in improving the efficiency of outpatient clinic workflow.

The data generated from the SOPC-QMS has enabled the hospital to enhance workflow processes and make timely adjustments to resource allocation. "For example, if waiting times were particularly long, more doctors could be called in," explained Dr. Chui. Aside from the queue status, the system is also used to make public announcements in Cantonese, Putonghua, and English. For its direct impact on enhancing service delivery to patients, the QMS won the Hospital Authority's Outstanding Team Award in 2016 and has become a prototype for the Hospital Authority's other out-patient clinics to adopt.

Further expansion

Dr. Chui acknowledges that despite UCH's many recent innovations, challenges keep mounting. "The demand that UCH has been facing is on the rise in terms of service volume and complexity amidst the constraint of physical space and continual manpower shortage," he said, adding that the hospital's existing facilities "are inadequate in terms of space, capacity and design to cope with the rising service demand." Increasing physical space has therefore been a key priority for the hospital.

In fact, Dr Chui shares that they are planning to build a 23-storey Ambulatory Block by 2023. The ambulatory block will add 560 beds to UCH's current capacity, bringing the hospital's total to 1,960 units. It will further increase the number of operating theatres from 13 to 18,



Close monitoring of works