

Q.32

Hong Kong's public healthcare system is overloaded, and the waiting times for some public hospital services are very long. How to shorten the waiting times for healthcare services at public hospitals is one of the issues Hong Kong has to tackle.

Source A: Data of Hong Kong's total health expenditure and Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

	At current market prices	
	Total health expenditure (HK\$ million)	GDP (HK\$ million)
2018-19	176,984	2,853,191
2019-20	189,624	2,797,950

(Source: Food and Health Bureau, HKSAR Government)

Source B: Some measures to nurture healthcare professionals in the 2022-23 Budget

- Provide 500 more designated places to provide subsidies for students to take self-financing undergraduate programmes on healthcare
- Earmark funding for the completion of works to upgrade and increase healthcare teaching facilities of universities to cope with the increase in healthcare training places

(Source: The 2022-23 Budget, HKSAR Government)

Source C: A news excerpt about the waiting time for stable new case booking at specialist out-patient clinics in public hospitals

According to the data on the waiting time for stable new case booking at specialist out-patient clinics published by the Hospital Authority, from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2021, among the different hospital clusters, the medicine (内科) department in the Kowloon East cluster and the eye department in the Kowloon West cluster had the longest waiting times of up to 152 weeks. That means some patients had to wait nearly 3 years to see a doctor.





(Source: various newspapers)

Source D: A news excerpt about the worsening shortage of healthcare professionals in public hospitals during the outbreak of COVID-19

To cope with COVID-19, some healthcare professionals in public hospitals have been redeployed to work in isolation wards and isolation facilities such as those at Penny's Bay (竹篙灣) and AsiaWorld-Expo. This has worsened the shortage of healthcare professionals in hospitals.

(Source: various newspapers)

Source E: Views on the healthcare services of Hong Kong

 <p>An operator of a private hospital</p>	<p>Private hospitals have vacant beds available for patients. The government may consider collaborating with private hospitals to improve public healthcare services in Hong Kong.</p>
 <p>A patient</p>	<p>I cannot work due to my illness and my income is greatly reduced. The waiting time for public hospital services is long, and I cannot afford to use private hospital services.</p>
 <p>A social worker</p>	<p>There is a big difference in fees charged by public hospitals and private hospitals. Even if the government subsidises the use of private hospital services, patients will still have to pay part of the fees themselves.</p>
 <p>A politician</p>	<p>The burden of medical expenses on the low-income group is higher than that on the high-income group. The government should take into account the financial capability of the low-income group.</p>

Questions

- (a) Refer to Source A. Describe the change in total health expenditure as a percentage of nominal GDP from 2018-19 to 2019-20. (2 marks)
- (b) Refer to Source B. With the aid of a diagram, explain how the measures mentioned in the source will affect Hong Kong's output and price levels in the short run. (4 marks)
- (c) Refer to Sources C and D. With the aid of a diagram, explain why the waiting time for services at specialist out-patient clinics in public hospitals might become longer during the COVID-19 epidemic. (5 marks)

For part (d), candidates are required to present their answer in essay form. Criteria for marking will include use of sources and economic theories, relevant content, logical presentation and clarity of expression.

- (d) Suppose the government has two strategies to shorten the waiting time for public hospital services.

Strategy I: To provide a flat-rate subsidy to citizens using private hospital services

Strategy II: To build new public hospitals and expand the existing public hospitals to provide more beds and medical facilities

With reference to the above sources and your own knowledge in Economics, discuss which strategy, strategy I or II, each of the following groups of stakeholders would prefer:

- patients
- private hospital operators
- politicians who are concerned about equity in Hong Kong society

(11 marks)

- (e) Refer to Sources A and E. Discuss whether strategy II in part (d) will *necessarily* worsen the government fiscal balance in the future. (3 marks)