

Return to prison not good for Chen: doctor

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Democratic Progressive Party legislators Chen Ou-po, right, and Hsu Chung-hsin hold a press conference in Taipei yesterday, calling on the Ministry of Justice to immediately release former president Chen Shui-bian from prison on medical parole.

Photo: Chen Chih-chu, Taipei Times

Former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) is suffering from various ailments, and it would not be good for him to return to prison, his attending physician told lawmakers yesterday.

Chou Yuan-hua (周元華), a psychiatrist in charge of Chen's care at Taipei Veterans General Hospital (TVGH), added that it would be better for the former president to be looked after at home or to stay in a hospital that has a psychiatry department near his home.

When Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Legislator Hsiao Bi-khim (蕭碧霞) asked if there was a possibility that Chen might commit suicide if he were sent back to Taipei Prison, Chou said: "There is definitely a possibility."

Chou was giving a report on the former president's current condition at a meeting of the legislature's Foreign Affairs and National Defense Committee.

After nasal septum deviation surgery recently, Chou said Chen's sleep apnea has improved, but there was a high risk of a relapse.

Chou added that Chen's speech impediment had not visibly improved over the past half year.

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Two brain magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) exams found that he has cerebral atrophy and hand tremors, and doctors are still monitoring these conditions.

While there seem to be signs that Chen is recovering from severe depression, he still suffers from anxiety and insomnia, Chou added.

“I know that Taipei Prison has tried to improve Chen’s environment in the prison, but the treatment of severe depression should factor in the atmosphere and the patient’s mental state. I believe it would not be good for Chen to go back to prison now,” Chou said.

TVGH superintendent Lin Fang-yue (林芳岳) told the meeting that TVGH is a hospital for the treatment of severe and emergency conditions. While Chen’s immediate symptoms have been treated, depression is a chronic disease that requires lengthy treatment in a psychiatric ward.

Despite the doctors’ report, Deputy Minister of Justice Chen Ming-tang (陳明堂) reiterated that Chen’s current medical treatment is sufficient to care for his long-term health, and his condition does not qualify him for medical parole.

DPP Legislator Chen Ting-fei (陳亭妃) said it was very clear that the medical report says Chen should be cared for at home and that he should not go back to the prison, but the ministry does not seem to comprehend the report.

Chen Ming-tang said the ministry would evaluate TVGH’s report and make a decision in three weeks.

The former president is serving a 20-year sentence for corruption.

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