

2.1 Deputy A.E. Jeune of St. Brelade of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding waiting time targets at the Pain Clinic:

Would the Minister advise what the waiting-time target is at the Pain Clinic from receipt of referral to being seen by the consultant? What percentage of referrals are seen within this timeframe and what is the current waiting time from receipt of referral to an appointment with the consultant in this clinic?

Deputy A.E. Pryke of Trinity (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

The target waiting time from receipt of referral to being seen by a consultant at the Pain Clinic is 13 weeks. The latest analysis from May 2011 indicates that approximately 30 per cent of patients are waiting over 3 months. As of June 2011, the waiting time for one of the Pain Clinic consultants is 11 weeks; for the second consultant it is 19 weeks. This particular consultant manages cancer patients who are in pain and, understandably, urgent cases take priority.

2.1.1 Deputy A.E. Jeune:

Does the Minister accept that 30 per cent of people in pain not being seen within 3 months is acceptable?

The Deputy of Trinity:

If patients are in severe pain then it is always advised that they can contact their G.P. (general practitioner) who will be in contact with the relevant consultants. Once they have been referred to the consultant each patient is sent a questionnaire for completion prior to being given an appointment and sometimes there are some delays; but there is a high volume of priority cases and it can take longer than the 13-week target, unfortunately.

2.1.2 Deputy A.E. Jeune:

Would the Minister accept that, having completed the form, as she correctly points out, somebody is still waiting after 6 months?

The Deputy of Trinity:

If the Deputy has a concern about a patient, then I suggest that perhaps she emails me and we will see what we can do; but the patients are clinically assessed by the consultant when the referral letter is sent.

2.1.3 The Deputy of St. John:

Given that I am aware of parishioners in my own Parish who have been waiting for at least 5 months, and probably going on to 6, and they cannot get an appointment at the Pain Clinic until August at the earliest (and I believe it is late August; I believe people were referred in February and they had correspondence in March) does the Minister consider that satisfactory for an Island that has always in the past praised itself on dealing with these things in a very short period of time; weeks, not in months, as is happening at the moment?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I can understand the Deputy's concerns and we look at waiting lists very carefully but, unfortunately, 70 per cent are seen within a 13-week timescale. The number of patients waiting over 13 weeks has reduced slightly over the last 5 months, but the number of referrals has increased and, where we had an average of 144 per month in 2010, there is now an average of 166 per month; that is referrals per month.

2.1.4 The Deputy of St. John:

A supplementary, Sir? Given there are 30 per cent of those people who are having to wait longer than the 4 or 5 months as given by the answer, does the Minister really think that her department should not be getting another locum in to assist so that these people are dealt with much quicker?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I hope the situation will improve because there has been a post vacant for a nurse specialist since the beginning of this year, because nurses are able to hold clinics in their own right. So that could be causing us some delay. The vacancy has been advertised and the recruitment is under way and there are a number of candidates short-listed for the interview.

2.1.5 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:

The Minister spoke of a recent review. Can she state whether this review covered other areas of expertise and specialism and whether waiting lists in those areas are under similar pressure to the Pain Clinic?

The Deputy of Trinity:

As I think I have said on many occasions and also in answers to written questions about waiting-list time, waiting lists are difficult at times because of the number of referrals. It continues to increase, as I have said, and we do keep a watch on waiting list times in all areas.

Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:

May I politely ask the Minister to answer the question? Does the survey cover other areas and are other areas under similar pressure?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I am not too sure we are talking about a survey.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

You talked about a survey.

The Deputy of Trinity:

No, I did not. I said a review. We look monthly at all reviews of all waiting-list times.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Would the Minister agree to publish those review lists?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I did do; I think. The last one was 2 or 3 months ago.

2.1.6 Deputy A.E. Jeune:

Would the Minister accept that if the G.P. was able to deal with the pain control he would not be referring the patient to the Pain Clinic and, therefore, to say that the patient should return to their G.P. is not necessarily correct?

The Deputy of Trinity:

If the pain has increased or got worse, then it is always advisable to return back to the G.P. because it needs to be reviewed and a G.P. can write to the consultant with a specific update on their concerns.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Before we come to question 2, can I say to Members that there are 25 questions today and, from the Chair, I am going to be more ruthless than usual about supplementary questions? Supplementary questions from the questioner will be permitted but supplementary questions from any other Member will not; so it will be one question only and then it will return for further supplementaries at the end to the first questioner. It is the only way I think we are ever going to stand a chance of getting through the bulk of these questions. Question 2, Deputy Le Claire, I understand you wish to withdraw?

Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire of St. Helier:

Yes, please, Sir.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Do you wish to say anything to the Minister about that?

Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

I have spoken to the Minister, Sir.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Question 3: the Deputy of St. Martin will ask a question of the Minister for Health and Social Services.