

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY
BY DEPUTY G.C.L. BAUDAINS OF ST. CLEMENT**

ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 29th JANUARY 2008

Question

With regard to his recent decision to dispense with prescription charges, can the Minister confirm that this will not be achieved by using cheaper, less effective, brands of drug?

Would the Minister confirm that his decision was based on addressing a surplus in the Health Insurance Fund (established under Article 30 of the Health Insurance (Jersey) Law, 1967) that subsidises prescriptions and, if so, state whether he considered using the surplus to assist with other medical charges, such as dentists' fees? If the Fund cannot be used for other medical charges, has the Minister considered bringing an amendment to the Health Insurance (Jersey) Law, 1967?

Answer

Neither the Minister nor the Department promotes the use of "less effective" drugs, so the answer to the question is an emphatic "yes".

The Minister presumes the question is directed towards the use of generic medicines, which are equivalent to patented drugs, but far less expensive.

The promotion of generic prescribing is accepted practice throughout the world as a means of delivering cost effective treatment. The NHS in the UK was recently criticised for its poor use of generic prescribing, leading to high cost growth in the NHS, whereas in Jersey we have a high rate of generic prescribing and there is no doubt that the healthy financial position of the Health Insurance Fund results in part from the pharmaceutical advice provided through the Department and the professionalism of GP's and Pharmacists in the Island.

As the Minister has already made very clear, the decision to increase the pharmaceutical benefit by £2.10 per prescription and thereby provide free prescriptions to all who are eligible under the Health Insurance (Jersey) Law 1967, is a result of an increasing surplus in the Health Insurance Fund.

Whilst the Health Insurance Law provides for the possibility of Dentist and Ophthalmic benefits, these have never been considered or approved by the States. The future primary care services and those to be delivered through the Health Insurance Fund will be determined by the New Directions Strategy and the Department has been and will be actively involved in that strategy's development and implementation.

Until measures consistent with and promoted by that strategy are delivered, the Minister will continue to use the Fund only for those benefits already approved by the States.