

2. Oral Questions

2.1 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier of the Minister for Social Security regarding problems encountered during the first 2 weeks of administering the Income Support system:

Will the Minister inform Members what problems, if any, have been encountered in the delivery of income support to applicants in the first 2 weeks of operation?

Senator P.F. Routier (The Minister for Social Security):

Considering the number of claimants involved in the transfer to income support and the differences between the old systems and the new system there have been very few problems of any significance in the first 2 weeks of operation. It was always expected given the scale of changes that there would be matters to be resolved once income support was in operation, and the department has always made this clear and built flexibility into its planning. However, implementation went as well as could be hoped for. The biggest challenge was always going to be the volume of activity in the first couple of weeks and I emphasise it is just the first couple of weeks. This turned out to be the case, with the staff and resources needing to be deployed to keep up with the number of inquiries. The staff's hard work, including over weekends, has paid off and activity has settled right down, now that we have moved into the third week. I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the staff at Social Security for their hard work over this busy time and draw Members' attention to the recently published social survey for 2007 in which 77 per cent of respondents rated the service they received from the department as either good or very good.

2.1.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Has the department received any inquiries from G.P.s (General Practitioners) over the working of H.M.A. (Household Medical Account) or other medical arrangements concerning income support?

Senator P.F. Routier:

The departments have been working with G.P.s on a regular basis over recent months to ensure that they are aware of how the system works. They are in continual contact with G.P.s to ensure that they are able to provide the service to the patient.

2.1.2 Deputy C.J. Scott Warren of St. Saviour:

Can the Minister assure Members that all patients who were formally on H.I.E. (Health Insurance Exemption) now know their household medical account details?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I cannot give that assurance because that is not the case. We are talking with the G.P.s on a regular basis to ensure that the correct information has been put into the record. What has happened is that people who were on H.I.E. originally, the records showed that they were with one particular doctor and in some cases they had not informed or made that information known to our income support team to ensure that their records were put with the correct doctor. There is quite a bit of work still to be done to ensure that the H.M.A. accounts are going to work in the way we intend them to. It is an ongoing piece of work which we are working closely with the doctors.

2.1.3 Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier:

Could the Minister give us the assurance that G.P.s in general have not been told that people who have an H.M.A., i.e. the people who used to be on H.I.E., are only allowed up to 2 home visits a year? Can he tell us that this is definitely not the case?

Senator P.F. Routier:

There is no set amount that people can have home visits, the G.P.s should be aware of that. There is no need for anybody to have been told that at all. The practice that will be in place is that if a G.P. feels the need to visit somebody's home they will do that without any need for any reference

to us to enable that to happen. The home visits will be monitored to ensure that people do receive the service that they require.

2.1.4. Senator S. Syvret:

Could the Minister give the Assembly an assurance that he had discussions with G.P.s before deciding that giving a blanket fee of charged prescriptions was a good and effective use of the surplus in the health insurance fund as opposed to directing it at other more important aspects --

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am sorry, Senator, I cannot see that arises out of the income support matter.

2.1.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisser of St. Saviour:

Would the Minister confirm that in delivering income support, the role of the parishes and of, indeed, each parish has now been clarified?

Senator P.F. Routier:

The week before last we had a very good meeting with the Comité des Connétables to finalise the details of the way things would move forward. There is a letter which still needs to be signed between ourselves which I intend signing in the next couple of days to finalise the final arrangements.

2.1.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister outline for Members and for members of the public what arrangements are in place for the administration of urgent or immediate requests for funds for emergency use?

Senator P.F. Routier:

As we have experienced in the first couple of weeks, we have in place a system whereby if somebody comes into the department and their needs are urgent we are able to provide them with an immediate payment. We have cashiers at the department who are able to -- the determining officer can make a decision about whether that need is urgent and the payment can be made.