

2.11 Deputy A.E. Pryke of Trinity of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the redeployment of the nursing team on Chevalier Ward:

Would the Minister inform this Assembly where the longstanding nursing team on Chevalier Ward is to be deployed?

Senator B.E. Shenton (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

Infection control is of high priority at the hospital and we are currently looking at a number of measures to improve this, including the refurbishment of a number of wards including the Corbiere Ward. The logistics of such a move are quite complex and spread out into a number of areas. No decisions have been made as yet as to how we are going to handle this. The short answer to the question is the Chevalier Ward's team will be deployed on the Chevalier Ward because no decisions have been made with regard to the closing of the Chevalier Ward, even on a temporary or permanent basis. It is an ongoing investigation. We are going to implement a number of changes at the hospital to improve infection control, as I said, but there is no point in talking to staff if you have made your mind up before you talk to them; so we are talking to staff, we are talking to management, we are looking at the logistics and we are going to make a decision very shortly. The short term answer is the Chevalier Ward staff will be employed on the Chevalier Ward.

2.11.1 Deputy A.E. Pryke:

I welcome any kind of increase by way of dealing with the high levels of M.R.S.A. (Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus) in the hospital but this is a longstanding nursing team that have worked very well together and they have got a very low level of M.R.S.A. on the ward, but what I understand, Sir, is that Chevalier Ward is going to be closed and the date is 1st June. Can the Minister confirm that, please?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

Fortunately, the Deputy's information is incorrect. I am waiting for proposals to be put to me as Minister but certainly no decisions have been made as yet.

2.11.2 Deputy C.J. Scott Warren:

I would like to ask the Minister if he has an initial timeframe for the measures regarding the £2 million being spent on infection control and would he agree that Clostridium difficile is an even worse threat across England and to us to some extent, than M.R.S.A.?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

There was an excellent programme on Panorama on Sunday concerning how important it is to get infection control, and to deal with it in an absolute 100 per cent manner. The closure of Corbiere Ward is necessary and the talk about closing Chevalier Ward, either temporarily or permanently, was due to the fact that you have to manage the number of beds you have within the hospital and obviously, if you do close a ward, you have to move those beds somewhere else, either on a temporary or permanent basis. As I said before, we have not made any decision on that but we will be improving standards at the hospital; that is certain. We will be investing in the wards and making them a safer place with regard to the sterilisation and so on, and we will be talking to staff to make sure that everyone buys-in to what we do.

2.11.3 Deputy S.C. Ferguson:

Apart from the fact that if you are having a problem with infection, perhaps you ought to look at your cleaning methods; this is a particularly skilled surgical team which I understand has been together for some 20 years dealing with urinary problems and so on. Is it really sensible to break up a skilled team in the way that is being implied? Would it not be better to utilise them? Instead of deploying them and losing the team, why not utilise them, for instance, on the loss-making and little used private ward?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

I do not disagree with the Deputy and we are looking at every area of infection control including cleaning methods and also the way that visitors can just sort of amble in and amble out. No decisions have been made. Unfortunately, this is one of these ones where sort of a fag end has been picked up and sort of run with. As Minister, I have not signed anything off. In fact, I have not even had a full report put to me as yet, so we are a little bit premature in talking about the demise of the Chevalier Ward when certainly nothing has been decided.

2.11.4 Deputy I.J. Gorst of St. Clement:

I would just like to make it clear for the avoidance of doubt that my wife does work at the hospital, but not on any of the wards affected as I understand it. The Minister said in answer earlier to the Deputy's question that work was being carried out on a number of wards. I wonder if he could tell us that once this work has been completed, they will then be suitable for service for a number of years, perhaps 2 to 3 years, or will they perhaps require work, further work, once this initial work has been completed?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

The work will be done on a structured basis. We can only close one ward at a time, so we have to deal with one ward and then once we have refurbished that, move on to the next. It will certainly last for 2 to 3 years. One of the big changes that has happened is you need more rooms, individual rooms for patients to come in, so they can be isolated. The old days of sitting in beds next to each other so that the germs can jump from bed to bed have long gone and the whole way that the wards are laid out will change and, certainly, the investment will be that we will look for long term return on that investment.

2.11.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Can the Minister confirm he is looking at parallel options such as individual testing as well as more and more deep cleaning and, secondly, can he confirm the date on which he will make the announcement because of the apparent perception that the decision has been made? What is the date on which he will announce the future of Chevalier Ward?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

I cannot give an exact date but it will be fairly shortly. We are looking to start the refurbishment work on Corbiere Ward in June. The ward is currently closed and, indeed, it may even stay closed until June. There are a number of issues, not least mainly staffing issues. Staffing are probably our most important asset and as has rightly been pointed out, we have a very good team on Chevalier Ward and we have to make sure that their skills stay together, and it may be that they stay together on Chevalier Ward but certainly it will be within full consultation with all the staff. It is a little bit of a pity that it has leaked out to the media and so on. I can understand why, but we are working with the staff. We are working very much as a team at the hospital. This is not a dictate from above. We are working as a team on this.

2.11.6 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Will there be individual testing?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

It is something we have looked into. It sounds very good on paper but then when you have 3,300 employees within Health, you have to know where to draw the barriers, so again, we will come back to you on that, but the whole strategy with regard to the control of infections, it will be covered within that which will be out within a number of weeks I should think.

2.11.7 Deputy A.E. Pryke:

I am very pleased to see that the Minister acknowledges that his greatest asset is the staff. If the decision is made to close Chevalier Ward within the next couple of months, would the Minister confirm that the staff will be asked where they wish to go and also that they have a right of appeal?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

They certainly will be consulted. In fact, they wrote to me as Minister and I am due to meet with the staff fairly shortly, but I wanted to make sure that we were a little bit further down the road as to what our decision was going to be. There is no point in meeting with staff if you cannot tell them anything, so I will be meeting with the staff over the next few weeks and will have a chat with them, but certainly it is not cut and dried what will happen with Chevalier Ward at the moment.