

4. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Minister for Health and Social Services:

The Bailiff:

We come to the second period which is for the Minister for Health and Social Services.

4.1 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Early on this morning Senator Shenton said the answers had not been given to written answers to one of his questions and I would like to maybe get an answer or some of the answers that have not been given to the questions I have here. Question 16: I asked would the Minister give the reasons for the exclusion and reasons why the consulting gynaecologist is still excluded - this is regarding the Verita inquiry - and the answer is: "The exclusion of a member of staff is not covered within Verita's terms of reference." Nothing to do with the question. Could I ask the Minister would the Minister give the reasons for the exclusion of the consulting gynaecologist and why is he still excluded?

The Deputy of Trinity (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

I am sure Members would appreciate this is a very difficult area. In one area we have the Verita investigation looking into the actions or whatever leading up to the death of Mrs. Rourke on that fateful day and on the other side we have what the Deputy is talking about, the exclusion of a consultant. The investigation into that exclusion is a separate piece of work regarding Verita and that the moment I have a duty of care to that employee and I have to maintain confidentiality. I am very much aware that I am sure it is frustrating for the Deputy. It is frustrating for me. It is frustrating for the department. But I am sorry to say this is where we are at the present moment of time. I have to maintain confidentiality. That is very important. As I said, I have a duty of care to that employee.

4.1.1 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Could I come back and maybe ask an easier question of the Minister? Will the Minister agree that the reason why no reason has been given for the exclusion is because no reason has ever been given?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I am trying to be helpful but my hands are very much tied. It is confidential. I know that it is frustrating for the Deputy and, as I said, it is frustrating for me. But that is where I am; I have a duty of care, of confidentiality to the consultant and it is going through due process.

4.2 Senator J.L. Perchard:

I am aware of the long-standing detailed plans for the redevelopment of Clinique Pinel and Rosewood House. These plans would, if implemented, greatly relieve the unacceptable pressures on staff, patients and clients at St. Saviour's Hospital. Can the Minister advise the Assembly of (a) whether the refurbishment of Rosewood House and Clinique Pinel is included in the detailed fiscal stimulus programme, and (b) will the Minister advise the Assembly of which other areas under her responsibility will benefit from the fiscal stimulus programme?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I went up to Clinique Pinel and Rosewood House a couple of months ago and was very much aware that it needed some refurbishment. I took the Minister for Treasury and Resources up there with me and said: "Would this fit into the fiscal policy stimulus?" This is what we are going to do. Both Clinique Pinel and Rosewood House, in the short-term, is part of the fiscal stimulus strategy. The plans are just about finalised. It needs some sort out because if Rosewood House or Clinique Pinel is going to be refurbished then we will need to put the patients somewhere on another ward before we can do the plans for that ward. I have been having discussions with Alzheimer's Society too, so they are very much on board. But part of

that fiscal stimulus strategy is also looking at the long-term care of patients in Rosewood and Clinique Pinel, whether we can build a new unit. That is the long-term care and I am looking at that hopefully at Overdale.

4.2.1 Senator J.L. Perchard:

Part (b) of my question was what other areas under the Minister's responsibility will be benefiting from the fiscal stimulus programme?

The Deputy of Trinity:

The other part is Les Chenes, St. Mark's Hostel, which is for people who are just leaving care before they go out on their own; before they go over 21. That has needed great refurbishment but what is already in the pipeline is for Les Chenes to be upgraded to include that. So they will be moving to Les Chenes. The fiscal stimulus policy bid is put in. The other areas, there are some areas within the hospital that need sorting out and upgrading. I can give the Senator a list because I am sure I have forgotten something, but those 3 are the main areas.

4.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Can Members all hear me? I think there has been a problem with my microphone. Possibly if I am not an accredited politician. [Members: Oh!] Seriously, there was a problem with the microphone earlier, that is why I ask. Members and the Minister will know that yesterday a meeting took place at Fort Regent which had an unprecedented attendance of over 1,000 union members and other States employees. Given the fact that so many of those members are part of her department, will the Minister be showing her support for the decision that was taken last night that the employees have no confidence in the States Employment Board and, subsequently, will she also be voting to show that she has no confidence when the vote comes?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Yes, I was very much aware of the meeting last night and I had been in touch with Nick Corbel earlier on in the day. What can I say to that? I value each member of staff within my department, both in Health as well as Social Services. To that end the most important thing that I can do in this present moment in time is to find investment in the nursing staff review, because that is important to get our staffing levels up to the required standard. As you know, the nursing staff review has happened over the last couple of years and it identified that we are short of nurses in many areas. That is of great concern, not only to me but to the unions; as well as to the nursing staff who do work long hours, and I thank them for that, as well as overtime. It includes the bank staff and getting agency nurses, which is at a price too. So that investment of £2 million ... sorry, I rabbit on.

4.3.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I do have a supplementary. Given the intransigence of the Council of Ministers on pay and also given the similar intransigence of the unions that no negotiations seem to be taking place, what contingency plans does she have for when industrial action does take place in Jersey and when the doctors and nurses walk out?

The Deputy of Trinity:

The house service, the nurses and everyone there - the nurses especially - are the backbone of the department. They work 24/7, 365 days of the year and I value them and I think what the Deputy is saying at this present moment is ... this is scaremongering because there are patients who trust and are coming into hospital who are very anxious; concerned about what treatment they are going to have, perhaps what operations are they going to have. I would like to put them at rest that it is business as usual. The hospital is very busy. The nurses are working hard. The doctors are working hard. We are all there for the benefit of the patients.

4.4 Deputy A.E. Jeune:

Is the Minister as shocked this morning as I am in relation to the answer given by the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture in terms of the number of nurses ... number of students going from Jersey this year to undertake nursing training, being one for midwifery and 2 for nursing, and particularly given the fact that we are aware through *NMC News* that these students go and do the training but a number of them do not intend ever joining the profession? Similarly, in relation to the written question 8 this morning, given that there are 1,071 nurses on the Jersey register, of which 569 are employed in the department, that allows at least 40 to 50 per cent out in the private sector or not walking at all.

The Bailiff:

Deputy, a concise question, please. There are a lot of other Members who want to ask questions.

Deputy A.E. Jeune:

Does she feel that more can be done to encourage people to work in Health and Social Services?

The Deputy of Trinity:

There is always more work that can be done to encourage and, even though the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture said that a nurse and a midwife have gone for further training, I am very pleased to say that last week I addressed a new group of 21 students who are beginning their student nurse training locally. That is a great asset and a great advancement. So I am extremely pleased with that and 4 of which, I think, were from a bursary from Education. But we have got a policy of recruitment and the number of people on the local register is that number. I am sure the good Deputy knows, like myself, to be able still to practice, nurses still need to perform I think it is 150 hours a year, and also training to keep their register active. If they do not do that, obviously they cannot practice or, if they wish to come back to practice, they need to do a back-to-nursing course, which is what I will have to do in 3 or 4 years' time; so making sure that our nurses are trained. Perhaps it is something that we should look at. With so many who are on the local register but who cannot practice for one reason or another, perhaps we need to think of a back-to-nursing course; which I understand one was done quite a few years ago.

4.4.1 Deputy A.E. Jeune:

I am a little surprised that you say that there are 1,071 but they are not all able to practice. I would have thought if they are on the register then surely they can practice?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I will check that but I think to be able to practice you need to do your continuing training and professional development. But I will check that.

4.5 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:

Can I, first of all, say the meeting that the unions held last night, each and every one of us States Members were invited along to that. There were a few Deputies, one Member of the Council of Ministers and I believe one Assistant Minister that attended. We, as the States, employ a huge number of people in the Island. S.E.B. (States Employment Board) are the actual employers and they have taken away the bargaining rights of all employees by enforcing a pay freeze. Now, we know in your department that you have a problem with staff and retention ...

The Bailiff:

Deputy, can you come to the question, please?

Deputy D.J. De Sousa:

Not much longer. Not just in nursing but also in the other fields in your department. Can the Minister please guarantee that, with all the cuts that she has been forced to make, she will not

look at contracting out services, i.e. domestics and catering, because these staff are worried about their jobs?

The Deputy of Trinity:

As I said before, I value each member of the staff and that is from nurses, consultants, doctors, as well as the catering staff, as well as the cleaning staff because the cleaning staff do play an important job in the actual cleaning with regard to infection control and without them, without anybody, no one could work. We all do need each other. I would like to confirm that I have no intention of contracting any of their services out.

The Bailiff:

Very well, I am afraid that brings time to an end.

Deputy A.E. Jeune:

Just for the record, Sir, may I just say Deputy De Sousa suggested that there was one Assistant Minister at the meeting last night. I believe there was more than one.

The Bailiff:

That completes question time.