

#### **4. Questions to Ministers Without Notice - The Minister for Health and Social Services**

##### **The Deputy Bailiff:**

Very well, so we return then to the second question period to Ministers without notice which is to the Minister for Health and Social Services. I had seen Deputy Dupre first. **[Laughter]**

##### **4.1 Deputy A.T. Dupre of St. Clement:**

I was fast on the button today. Hearing the news this morning that Jersey Hospice Care is going to extend Clarkson House does the Minister envisage that the Health Service will be asked to contribute towards this worthy cause?

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

Hearing it on the news - as you know I used to be a home care assistant with the Hospice - it is very nice to see that they are wishing to extend. They provide a very good service not only to their patients and families of the Island, but also the expert advice that they give to my department now. I am very pleased with that and I know that at the moment they wish to be self-funding and they need to be congratulated for that. If they need any funding - at the moment I do not see that because that is one of their strengths - I am open to anything really.

##### **4.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

President Obama is intending to reduce the cost of healthcare in the U.S. (United States) by 2 billion dollars a year. In view of the fact that Health and Social Services is one of the largest budgets in States expenditure and in view of the current dismal financial forecast and probable structural deficit in 2012 how does the Minister intend to approach this?

##### **The Deputy of Trinity:**

As with all States departments we are under great financial pressures, and I am very much aware that is not going to go away in the short-term especially, hence P.17/2009. I think one of the things I did do was appoint one of my Assistant Ministers who has special responsibility for the finances, and it is perhaps that over the years the department has lacked political oversight into this so he has that portfolio of looking at the finances to see where and if money can be saved. There is no easy answer because there are great pressures underneath health and that is not going to go away with modern technology, the price of drugs, *et cetera*, but it will have some political oversight.

##### **4.2.1 Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

A supplementary. I would ask the Minister if this means that we can expect to see some accurate figures for management costs as highlighted in the recent report on health structure.

##### **The Deputy of Trinity:**

I hope so, and I am sure with the Deputy's political oversight he will be able to ensure that.

##### **4.3 Deputy A.E. Jeune:**

Does the Minister consider that the Health Department have robust procedures in place to ensure that those persons receiving emergency and necessary care within the hospital and/or from other services - for example the Ambulance Service - can either be charged themselves or their insurers invoiced and that those from countries with whom we do have a reciprocal agreement, that the costs of treating these persons are identified?

##### **The Deputy of Trinity:**

It is a very difficult area. Tourists that come over here, whether they are to stay... or to stay with their families, need to be aware that they have to be insured. I think that Tourism have worked very hard with that and are working with a company to try and make sure that they are informed.

I understand that there was an advertisement in one of the national papers over the weekend advertising that tourists need to be insured. There are different reciprocal health agreements with other countries like the Isle of Man, the Isle of Wight and some European countries and yes, it can be very confusing. Perhaps we need to get some sort of leaflet out that can explain to everyone which health reciprocal agreement we have with which country, and if we do not to ensure that the tourists have travel insurance in place. There are some procedures set down in the hospital if that does happen and we will look at it; we are looking at it.

#### **4.4 The Deputy of St. Martin:**

At present there are 2 Health and Social Services employees who have been suspended for very lengthy periods. Is the Minister satisfied with the continuation of the suspensions and if not what steps is the Minister taking to expedite the investigation into the allegations that have been made against the 2 employees?

#### **The Deputy of Trinity:**

I understand that is correct and I am certain that there is going to be delay while criminal investigations are undertaken. Other than that you must appreciate I have not had time to get down to ask for the full briefing on that, but that is on my agenda fairly soon and I will be briefed on that.

#### **The Deputy of St. Martin:**

Could I seek assurance from the Minister that maybe she could keep me posted if nobody else, maybe within the next week? I would be grateful.

#### **The Deputy of Trinity:**

Yes, Sir.

#### **4.5 Deputy S. Pitman:**

The Minister has recently publicly said that she would like to see free doctor's visits for over 50s. Does she not agree that this should include all those on income support given that a significant number are chronically ill and are only on income support because they are ill and they cannot work, and that we really should be scrapping free prescriptions for all?

#### **The Deputy of Trinity:**

There are a couple of points to your question. Free prescriptions and those on income support really come under the remit of the Minister for Social Security. Regarding over 55s getting free G.P. (general practitioner) visits, the *J.E.P. (Jersey Evening Post)* headline was: "Over 55s free." In fact, if you read the article I stood up here and said what I suggest is one free G.P. visit perhaps for over 55s equivalent to an M.O.T. (Ministry of Transport) test because I still think that is a good idea because prevention is better than cure.

##### **4.5.1 Deputy S. Pitman:**

As the Minister has expressed that she believes there should be at least one visit for over 50s does she have an opinion that this should expand to all those on income support that are chronically ill?

#### **The Deputy of Trinity:**

I need to be briefed in that before answering the question and I will take it up with the Minister for Social Security.

#### **4.6 The Deputy of St. John:**

Could Members be told which countries Jersey currently has a health agreement with, and if the Minister is not able to answer the question in full at the moment will she please inform the

Members in writing later on, but also put out a press release to that effect so when people are travelling off-Island they have an indication of where they can go and are covered by insurance? Also, will she work with Social Security to put in place an off-Island travel scheme for all ages?

**The Deputy of Trinity:**

As I said yes, we do have reciprocal health agreements with different countries. It is confusing and I give that reassurance that I think it would be a good idea to put a leaflet out so everybody is absolutely clear if they go to other places than the U.K. that they know whether they need travel insurance or do not need travel insurance so they know exactly where they are. It can only be of benefit to them. What is the other point?

**The Deputy of St. John:**

The second part was to do with would you work with Social Security to put in an insurance scheme for travelling off-Island?

**The Deputy of Trinity:**

Yes, I think we need to look at this especially for over 80s or 85s because they are finding it difficult to get travel insurance. I have meetings lined up with some of the insurance companies just specifically to look at this area to see if we can do something positive, especially for that age group.

**4.7 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Notwithstanding the outcome of any debates to be had today or tomorrow on funding and notwithstanding the agreement, or absence of a service level agreement, with the current management board at Brig-y-Don, will the Minister undertake to return to this House with a clear strategy for a way forward for the use of Brig-y-Don as a children's home and its experienced staff within the next 6 weeks?

**The Deputy of Trinity:**

As I have said many times this morning I want to find a positive way through working with staff at Brig-y-Don, but at the moment, as I said, the building is going to close at the end of August because the charity is a good employer and by law they have to give 4 months notice. I will work through and I will report back to this House when a strategy can be implemented, but to say in 6 weeks is a bit of a tall order, I think. I will try and do it as soon as I possibly can because I know I have to work with the charity and the trust to find a way forward.

**4.7.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Does the Minister not accept that with or without the charity acting in its current role a future needs to be found for Brig-y-Don and its staff and that notwithstanding any debate about funding or agreements that there must be a way forward found in the shortest possible time scale? Will she undertake to do that in the 6-week period?

**The Deputy of Trinity:**

As I said, I will try as soon as I can, but some of it is out of my hands. I need to sit down with the charity and I cannot keep them or myself to a 6-week period. I will do it as I possibly can and report back to this House.

**4.8 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Is the Minister satisfied that progress towards ratification of the U.N. (United Nations) Convention on the Rights of the Child, which incidentally was ratified by the U.K. in 1991, is being maintained and can she assure the House that adequate funding will be available to implement all relevant requirements if this is ratified?

**The Deputy of Trinity:**

I am very much aware of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but to give the Deputy as full an answer as I possibly can at the moment, I have not been briefed on that, but I will come back and report and send a note out to all States Members.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

I thank the Minister for that undertaking.

**4.9 Senator S. Syvret:**

It was mentioned by an earlier questioner that the U.S.A. is going to be seeking to cut healthcare costs. Would the Minister agree with me, given that approximately 50 per cent of the population of the U.S.A. do not in fact have ready access to healthcare, that it is the most disastrous healthcare system in the established western democracies in terms of access to healthcare and availability of healthcare?

**The Deputy of Trinity:**

I have enough on my plate to think about the healthcare of Jersey [**Approbation**] and I do not really want to take on the healthcare of the United States.

**4.10 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:**

Given that over the years there have been rightly or wrongly allegations about the size of the management structure in health, how will the Minister for Health and Social Services go about getting independent advice so she can make her own conclusions about these issues?

**The Deputy of Trinity:**

I think it is very important to get independent advice and, at the moment, there are several avenues that perhaps I want to expand on along with my 2 Assistant Ministers. Other than that I have not really thought any more, other than I do need it.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

That brings Questions without Notice to the Minister to an end.