

4.5 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire of St. Helier of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the policy for overseas travel support for patients:

Would the Minister advise the Assembly whether patients are required to provide the Health and Social Services Department with copies of their income tax forms in order to assess overseas travel support and if so when was this policy introduced?

Senator J.L. Perchard (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

The Deputy has today submitted both an oral and written question which cover exactly the same territory. I refer him to my detailed response to his written question. It is though worth repeating a few important points. My department has a travel policy which was introduced in 1998. The aim of the policy was to give financial assistance to Islanders who were required to travel to the mainland for specialist healthcare services. The travel policy sets out the criteria for the receipt of financial assistance. My answer to the Deputy's written question explains the circumstances in which a patient or client can or cannot receive assistance from the States. The 2007 revision of the travel policy introduced a requirement for a patient or client travelling to the mainland to provide documentation which attested to his or her financial status. Such documentation might be a statement about the patient's or client's income support status or their previous year's income tax statement. Before the 2007 revision members of my staff had to somehow determine whether a patient or client had such eligibility. I am saddened to report that there were a number of blatant attempts by relatively wealthy people to suggest that they did not have the required resources to travel to the mainland. The 2007 policy revision requires a patient or client who wishes to receive financial support for travel to provide demonstrable evidence of their financial status. I believe this process works well. It is fair and is in the taxpayers' best interests. It also permits my department to apply a greater financial resource to the provision of free healthcare for all Islanders.

4.5.1 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Such a comprehensive answer, and I do thank the Minister because in the written answer he gave me this morning there is a lot of rationale behind the policy itself and obviously we want to ensure that people are not accessing taxpayers' money in the wrong way. But could I ask 2 points from this? The first one is what is the threshold that determines whether or not people are able to access free travel, and why does the department insist on knowing people's income when they are paying their own travel and making their own travel arrangements? What is the purpose of the department needing to know that?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

I have a comprehensive list of additional information which it is not appropriate to read out. I will share it with the questioner immediately and I am not aware that the department requests financial information from somebody who is prepared to resource their own travel. I do not believe that to be the case but I can check.

4.5.2 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Is it not possible for him to give me a general understanding of the threshold that the department sets in order for people to access travel?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

It is not. It depends whether it is a single person with children, with one child, 2 children, married couples. I have a whole page here which I will share.

4.5.3 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

I appreciate the answer that he has given me. I would just like as a final supplementary to ask if that is confidential information and if it is not could he share it with all Members please?

The Deputy Bailiff:

I think an answer must be concise and I do not think it sounds as if ...

Senator J.L. Perchard:

Yes, I am happy to share information with regards to the thresholds to all Members.