

2.9 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the pressure on bed space within the Mental Health Service:

Notwithstanding annual fluctuations, is the Minister aware of the pressure of bed space within the Mental Health Service and the subsequent pressure it is putting on staff and if so what steps, if any, are being taken to resolve this issue?

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

I will ask my Assistant Minister to answer this question.

Deputy E.J. Noel of St. Lawrence (Assistant Minister for Health and Social Services - rapporteur):

We are indeed aware of pressures of bed space within the Mental Health Service and we are mindful that this pressure must have a negative effect both on clients and on members of staff. The Mental Health Service provides a range of services which range from children and young families through to old age psychiatric. There is a pressure on this range of services as more and more clients are presenting for treatment and, in addition to this fundamental fact, demand is driven particularly by the ageing population, a factor which is placing dementia services under great strain at the moment. While these pressures are significant and will have to be addressed in the near future, it is important to bear in mind that the model of service for mental health clients is a very progressive and modern one. The emphasis is very much upon supporting clients and their families to live in the community for as long as practical and safe for them to do so through a range of measures which include community psychiatric nurses, rehabilitation centres, sheltered accommodation and day centres. The service which is particularly acute at this time is indeed for the services for dementia sufferers where Rosewood House has an occupancy rate of some 98 per cent, and we can inform the Deputy that there is a significant number of vacancies for qualified nursing staff which we are finding difficult to recruit. Indeed this has been the case for almost a year now.

2.9.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I thank the Assistant Minister for his answer, and just following on from that last part in particular talking about the difficulty to recruit staff, I think the next question is quite pertinent. Is the Assistant Minister aware that due to the absence of a suitable facility that prisoners with a mental illness are being treated in the mainstream mental health service and that this situation is putting undue pressure on the infrastructure and on the staff, many of whom, I am lead to understand, are feeling the pressure in particular? Would the Assistant Minister comment?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I am happy to comment. There is quite a great deal of cross-over between the prison service and the health services area and the working party has been set up to look at this and met some 2 weeks ago. So we are hopefully getting some progress in the coming months.

2.9.2 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Could the Assistant Minister confirm or deny that children have been treated in the adult admissions unit and if the answer is yes, does he feel this to be acceptable?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I am not aware of any children being treated in the adult unit; that information has not filtered down to me. I am aware that there are some issues with youths and the sentencing regime and this is a cross-over between the prison service and the health service.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Could I just advise the Assistant Minister that I can provide evidence to the positive that that is indeed so.

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I would be delighted to see it.

2.9.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier:

Could I ask the Assistant Minister if he can tell the House how many times the police have been called to the Mental Health Unit because the staff have lost control in recent times because of under staffing?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

No, I am not able to give that information, I do not have it to hand.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Could I ask the Minister if he would supply it with a written answer please?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Happy to do so.

2.9.4 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Given the shortage of mental health staff, would the Assistant Minister outline what steps he is taking to rectify this and is one of those steps the provision of locally-based training?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

As mentioned in the main part of my original answer, the department have been actively recruiting for a year now and it has been proved difficult. New initiatives hopefully will be coming out shortly.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Do the initiatives include locally based training?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Wherever possible we will be using locally based training, yes.

2.9.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

I believe I inferred from the previous answer that the Assistant Minister is saying that cases of mental health illness are going up globally as a trend. Can he also confirm that? If he cannot I certainly will: bed space has been consistently and systematically cut in the Mental Health Service over the last 5 years and how does he reconcile that with the increase in the population that he voted for?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

The Deputy has more information than I have on this, quite obviously. I am not aware that bed numbers have been decreasing over the last few years. I am happy to look into that and perhaps we could have a discussion later.