

4.11 Deputy S. Pitman of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding discussions with the pay groups representing Health and Social Services staff regarding the public sector pay freeze:

What role, if any, will the Minister take in discussions with the pay groups representing Health and Social Services staff regarding the public sector pay freeze?

Deputy A.E. Pryke of Trinity (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

While I am sympathetic to the concerns of staff relating to the pay freeze, I have indeed met with union representatives where this and other matters relating to conditions of employment have been discussed. There is no specific role for me in discussions with pay groups representing Health and Social Services staff regarding the pay sector pay freeze. Pay and negotiations are the responsibility of the States Employment Board under the States of Jersey Employment (Jersey) Law 2005.

4.11.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Minister not accept that she has a crisis in the Health Service over retention and recruitment of nursing staff in particular, but other staff also, and that a pay freeze at this time does little to help prospects for increasing recruitment and retention rates in the nursing service?

The Deputy of Trinity:

As we all know, there are indeed issues regarding recruitment and retention but it is part of the Business Plan which we are discussing next week and Amendment 19 will address that problem. There has been a Nursing Staff Review and one of the issues there is to recruit more nursing trained staff and medical staff which will help enormously with that problem.

4.11.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is it not the case that she is in a vicious circle? As soon as nurses who are considering coming to the Island hear about recruitment rates and what cover is on and what overtime rates are being put in place, these nurses often put their tails between their legs and go elsewhere.

The Deputy of Trinity:

No, that is not always the case. The most important thing is that our nurses are working under pressure, they are working overtime and that is why it is important to implement that Nursing Staff Review as soon as we can, and that is why the request of the extra money which is in the Business Plan is so essential.

4.11.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

I believe it was last question time that the Minister confirmed that morale is an issue within workers in the Health Service and that recruitment is an ongoing issue within the service. So a simple question. Does she believe that the public sector pay freeze is a positive or negative on the morale of staff in her department?

The Deputy of Trinity:

It is very difficult to comment because it was a States decision. It is not my decision. It is a States decision that was made a little while ago and I have to abide by that.

4.11.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

I think the question was fairly simple. Are the staff in the hospital and in the Health Department in general happier now that they are not getting any kind of pay increase or are they less happy?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I would love happy staff but, as I have said, one of the pressures put on the staff is working extra overtime, and that is one of the issues that I discussed and the unions brought up with me as well; matters relating to their conditions of employment. What would help them enormously is if the House supported them and approved the extra funding needed, especially to implement that staff review which is going to be discussed this week. That will give them the extra boost.

4.11.5 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:

Is it not the case that the Minister informed a Scrutiny Panel recently that staff often, days before they are due to take up a post, are unable to do this because they find the cost of living and rental of accommodation here too expensive? So, therefore, would she not consider that she does need to have some input for the health workers on the subject of the pay freeze?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Indeed, the Deputy is quite right but we need to look in the wider context as well. Trained nurses are in shortage worldwide. This does not just affect Jersey. It affects the global situation that we are in. Whereas nurses apply for one job at a time, it has now changed. They tend to apply for several jobs at a time and when it comes down to the final push, shall we say, they make that choice and sometimes the choice is to not come here. Nurses are getting more specialised and that will pose a problem for us.

Deputy D.J. De Sousa:

I am sorry but she did not fully answer my question. I said: "So, therefore, does she not consider that she should have some input into the pay freeze on her staff?"

The Deputy of Trinity:

Sorry, I missed that part of the question. As I said, pay and negotiations are the responsibility of the States Employment Board and I am not a member of that Board.

4.11.6 Senator S. Syvret:

This is not a criticism of the Minister but it is an issue I would like her to address. In early 2007, when I occupied the office she now holds, I received the first draft of the long touted *New Directions Strategy*. I was so appalled that I wrote a 10-page detailed critique and one of the things I suggested in that critique was that there had to be a chapter on staff, on recruiting, on retention, on the welfare and conditions of staff and, in particular, a section on nursing. Now, can the Minister explain to the Assembly why all these years later, the management of her department appears not to have addressed these issues and brought these issues forward?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I cannot comment on the critique that you did but if you would like to send me a copy, I would very willingly look at it. The Nursing Staff Review was done by a U.K. specialist and it was done in correspondence with the unions as well as management staff and it went right across all the nursing disciplines. It was evidence-

based and by the time it was compiled and put to the department it was the beginning of this year. As I stress again, that is why this Amendment 19 is so important and I ask the House to support it later on in the week.

4.11.7 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Would the Minister agree that the £1.3 million plus that has gone keeping a suspended doctor off work had gone towards the nurses [Approbation], we would not have the shortage of nurses now?

The Deputy of Trinity:

It is very difficult for me to comment on that particular issue. We are where we are, but extra funding is earmarked especially for the Nursing Staff Review and it will be done accordingly if this House approves it.

4.11.8 Deputy S. Pitman:

I believe that I am repeating what Members have already said, but I think it does need to be reiterated. If the Minister had been at the Unite Meeting on 7th September, she would have got a great feeling for a lack of morale among her nursing staff, and a major part of that is the pay freeze. She said she has had discussions. What were those discussions? Also, what does she see her responsibility to the staff? We have to bear in mind that they are providing a vital service to this Island and their morale does impact on that service.

The Deputy of Trinity:

Yes, of course I totally agree with the Deputy that they are providing a good service and their morale is very important and, with the unions, one of the issues was the pay freeze but also the number of nurses who are on the wards. There is a shortage. The nurses are working extra hours as well as the full complement of bank staff and also agency staff. This all compiles to extra work and because the nurses are tired, morale is therefore low. I will stress that the service that they are giving is excellent. The hospital is at 100 per cent full capacity which, again, shows that the hospital is an extremely busy place, but the most important thing is if we can get on and have the sufficient funds to recruit more trained staff.