

3.13 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the current vacancy rates in the Health and Social Services Department.

Will the Minister inform Members what current vacancy rates exist against the services for which she is responsible and outline what action, if any, she is taking to remediate these rates?

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

Out of the 2,437 full-time equivalents there are approximately 120 full-time posts currently vacant. The vacancies exist across all staff groups as follows, 33 per cent registered nurses which are all grades, 13 per cent healthcare assistants, 25 per cent civil servants, 11 per cent manual workers, 0.5 per cent medical staff and 17.5 per cent other. The above is, of course, a constantly moving picture given the size and complexity of the departments. All vacancies are being actively managed following normal recruitment procedures. The department is developing local talents in response to a global shortage of qualified nurses for the Open University linked pre-registration nursing programme and this programme won the training and business award at the 2008 Jersey Enterprise Awards. In addition, the cadet scheme run in conjunction with Highlands College provides local residents with an opportunity to gain a vocational qualification in Health and Social Care. Still with nursing, in partnership with Education, Sport and Culture, there is a bursary scheme which offers a bursary training programme for school leavers and most recently we have started at the Insight days for students to attend and have a look at what a career in nursing and midwifery could offer them. The department is also participating in the apprentice scheme for manual workers. With regard to further actions I am taking, I refer the Deputy to my response in his written question which was this morning.

3.13.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is it correct that there are currently vacancies for doctors in Accident and Emergency and Gynaecology Services?

The Deputy of Trinity:

As I said, there are 0.5 medical staff vacancies but what the Deputy might be referring to is in the medical manpower, the part of the £1.1 million extra funding that we have got for the nursing and medical staff review which showed that there was, because of the working times, a need for vacancies within A.&E. and Obstetrics and Gynaecology. I am grateful that this House passed that because now we can go out and actively recruit doctors for those posts.

3.13.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

A supplementary, is it correct to state that improvement to conditions of services for medical staff which have been in place in the U.K. since March 2008 are still awaiting negotiation locally?

The Deputy of Trinity:

That is a very difficult question to answer. If the Deputy could be more specific, I will try to answer the question. If not, I will get back to him with the answer.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

I think the question then, without being more specific, is she aware that improvements in terms and conditions for U.K. doctors have yet to be implemented in Jersey?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I am not aware of that, but I will ask the question and come back to the Deputy.

3.13.3 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Vacancies aside, does the Minister agree that the result of the ill-considered pay freeze has brought the morale of existing nurses and hospital staff to its lowest ebb ever?

The Deputy of Trinity:

As I said in my speech for the Business Plan, I am very much aware that the morale in the hospital is low, but I must say, having walked around most of the wards since the Business Plan was approved, the morale has increased. Let me make it very, very clear, having those extra funds approved here has made a tremendous difference and we will go out and actively recruit more nursing staff.

3.13.4 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

The Job Families Agreement was promoted as an agreement that would end all agreements, so to speak. Would the Minister comment about whether this agreement is working or whether it has cost us an awful amount of money with not terribly obvious results?

The Deputy of Trinity:

The job families, I think that was done 4 or 5 years ago and a previous Minister. I do not know the outcome of that, other than it was not its finest moment, shall I say.

3.13.5 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:

Bearing in mind that the Minister realises that recruitment is really difficult and that her department has now received extra funds to target recruitment, can she not see that the pay freeze will hinder this?

The Deputy of Trinity:

With recruiting nurses, it is not just one aspect of pay. Obviously it is an important aspect but also the other working conditions such as staffing levels when the nurses are working under pressure and doing extra overtime on wards, that lowers the morale and it is not satisfactory for anyone, let alone nurses working in that, but also the patients. We have to look at the whole mix of accommodation, cost of housing and childcare and in response to Deputy Southern's written question, that has already started and working with the unions and a paper is going to be produced and the conclusions will be going to the States Employment Board.

3.13.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister confirm that the European Working Time Directive which applies to all trainee doctors, combined with medical vacancies, is placing a large stress on middle ranking doctors who deliver services and resulting in long hours of work?

The Deputy of Trinity:

In the other question that the Deputy had asked, all trainee doctors' rotas are compliant with the revised European working time directive, and if he knows anything different I will be pleased to hear from him.

3.13.7 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is that directive, combined with staff vacancies, causing untold pressure on middle ranked doctors who deliver services?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Not that I am aware of, but if he knows anything different, I will open to hear his comments.