

3.5 The Deputy of St. Martin of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the maintenance of clinical and operative skills of a surgeon during his suspension

Following the responses given on 22nd June 2010, when the Minister undertook to inform Members how the suspended surgeon's skills were maintained when the terms of suspension denied him access to the hospital, will she advise who was responsible for his continuous professional development and give detailed account of how his clinical and operative skills were maintained both during the suspension and since the suspension was lifted?

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

I am pleased to be able to report last month that the most recent review resulted in a decision to lift the exclusion of this clinician. During the period of exclusion both the Directorate Manager and the head of medical staffing were in regular contact with this individual. Support through the provision of study leave has continued, and I am pleased to be able to confirm that this clinician has attended 5 courses during this period.

[10:15]

Further support has also been offered through the identification of a mentor from within the senior clinical work force but this opportunity at present has been declined. With the confines of an exclusion which is designed to protect patient safety, I believe all that could be reasonably done is being done to maintain skills.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Can I just remind Members of the courtesy that should be shown both to the questioner and to the person speaking in relation to moving out of the Assembly at the time of the speech being made. Deputy St. Martin.

3.5.1 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I thank you for that observation, Sir. It was very difficult to hear the answer. I did ask if she would give a detailed account of how the clinician's clinical and operative skills were maintained, both during the suspension and afterwards. I did not receive that in the answer. Is the Minister able to give me the full answer now?

The Deputy of Trinity:

As I explained, the study leave was continued and there was a further 5 periods of study leave which was approved with the head of the medical staffing committee. I have not seen the detailed account of exactly which study courses that he has been on because I did not think it was appropriate. I was offered to see it but I thought that it is not appropriate for me to look at.

3.5.2 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I am afraid that the Minister has not really given an answer again. Those courses were just courses where one attended, like a conference, but is the Minister able to confirm then that during the course of those 5 courses that the clinician attended that the clinician was given an opportunity to practice his operative skills during the course of those 5 conferences he attended?

The Deputy of Trinity:

As I said, I have not seen the details of the 5 study courses other than to say that I saw the paperwork, but from my point of view I do not think it was appropriate for me. So, I do not know if the operational skills were included. As I said before, it is up to every individual, whether they are nurses, teachers, doctors or whatever, to continue their continuous professional development. Most of that is set down by their regulatory body and it applies to everyone.

3.5.3 Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville:

What role was the mentor meant to provide? What were they meant to achieve, and who was paying for this service if it had been taken up?

The Deputy of Trinity:

As I understand, the role of a mentor is within Health and Social Services, so there was not going to be any extra costs. The role of any mentor is one I see that is sitting down with any individual in whatever area they work and working out where they want to be and going from there.

3.5.4 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Surgery is a very practical profession and in view of the fact that the surgeons were suspended it is unlikely that they would have been able to find bodies on which to practise. Does the Minister not think that in view of the publicity over the suspension of surgeons and the Verita report that she should perhaps have taken a more direct interest in how these suspended surgeons were being treated?

The Deputy of Trinity:

The whole role of suspensions is unfortunately a long and difficult one. As we know with this one it had involved the Health and Safety Inspectorate and the Law Officers, and it has taken time, and with the States of Jersey Police. As I have said on many times, and I will continue to say, that patient safety has to be my paramount concern and until all the issues are raised and concerned and sorted out patient safety is my number one priority.

3.5.5 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

In view of the fact that there is no Medical Director at the hospital at the moment and therefore the suspensions will have been handled by lay people, does the Minister not think that she should have taken more interest?

The Deputy of Trinity:

That role of Medical Director at present is being very well covered by 3 leading medical clinicians who have been working out the role of Medical Director between them in different areas, so all areas are covered, and I can say that they are doing an extremely good job and they are doing the role very, very well indeed.

3.5.6 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I think we all agree that patient safety is important but it is important to ensure that the doctors who are able to carry out their responsibilities are given the proper training for it. Can I ask the Minister, is the doctor back to duty and up to full duties now, and also do those full duties include the carrying out of operations? So, in other words, his skills had been maintained and he is now back operating with patients. Is that a fact? If not, why not?

The Deputy of Trinity:

The surgeon is back to work, but that does not include from the clinical side because the investigation still needs to be completed. I understand that I said about the study leave but there is also other work that he is doing. I understand that is research and audit work.