

Questions to Ministers without notice - The Minister for Health and Social Services

The Bailiff:

Very well, then we move on to the second period of questions without notice is to the Minister for Health and Social Services, which under the Standing Order 64A will now be to the Assistant Minister.

5.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Recently the Health Protection Unit was quoted in the *Jersey Evening Post* stating that they were content or satisfied with the disposal of rubbish at the Bay Leaf Restaurant and found no evidence of vermin. Will the Assistant Minister advise Members whether first of all it is the usual practice for the Health Protection Unit to give positive publish endorsements of commercial premises and, secondly, can he confirm that the article was accurate and that the officers were quoted accurately?

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

I believe that the quote of the officers were accurate, but out of context.

5.1.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Would the Assistant Minister be surprised to know that the article was factually incorrect in that it stated that the complaint about the rubbish and its dispersal by seagulls was made by members of the public when it was in fact made by 2 of the District Deputies, Deputy Green and myself and that photographs were produced of this rubbish, which they said was not a problem? Can he also confirm the statement made by the Health Protection Officer to residents that they must see a rat themselves before they will accept reports from members of the public that the rubbish attracted rats?

The Bailiff:

Deputy, can I just remind you and others that Standing Order 10(7) says a questioner will not ask whether any statement in the media is accurate.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I will remember that in the future. Can the Minister please confirm though the statement about the rats? Do they have to see a rat before they know a rat? **[Laughter]**

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I believe under the law our officers can only act on evidence and the evidence has to be there before they can act.

5.2 Deputy A.E. Jeune:

Trying to get information out of the Health Department is like extracting teeth. **[Laughter]** It is extremely difficult. I have put in written questions and oral questions. The answers given are not the answers to the questions raised half the time. Then you are told send in an email. You send that and you still do not get the answer.

The Bailiff:

So your question today ...? **[Laughter]**

Deputy A.E. Jeune:

The question is why can Members not receive information requested? Why, when information requested is said to be personal when it is not? It is asking questions about what expenses are being paid in relation to a post. We have a right to know that. When, will the Health Department's Ministerial team please give us answers?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

We do our best to give answers to the good Deputy. In fact on many occasions I have personally invited her in to come and discuss such matters. There are some instances where it is outside our control in terms of our employees, because she is asking the wrong people. The Deputy should be asking S.E.B. (States Employment Board). **[Laughter]** Again, I invite the Deputy to come and speak to us and we will endeavour to satisfy your quest for knowledge.

5.2.1 Deputy A.E. Jeune:

I did ask S.E.B. if they could let us know these salaries paid and how they compared with the U.K. in a written question at the last sitting. The information is not correct. Thank you. How does the Assistant Minister justify asking S.E.B.?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I am sure if the good Deputy would come into my department's offices we will be able to answer the questions that she has in full.

5.3 The Connétable of St. Mary:

Bearing in mind that the main public parking for the hospital is situated at the opposite end of the building from the main public entrance, is the Assistant Minister able to confirm to me whether the Patriotic Street entrance is open to the public at all times during visiting hours, including on a Sunday?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

No, I do not have that detail to hand. I am sure that for the majority of normal working hours that that entrance is open, but I am sure for security reasons in the latter part of the day and maybe very early in the morning there may be a reason for that entrance not to be available to the public.

5.3.1 The Connétable of St. Mary:

Supplementary, Sir? I would be grateful; would the Minister undertake to look into that? Because I maintain that for a large number of visitors to the hospital it is extremely difficult for them to walk all the way around the hospital and then probably most of the way back inside the hospital to almost where they started. A lot of those visitors are old and infirm, not necessarily disabled. I would say that in a building as important as our General Hospital this must be addressed.

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Yes, I am quite happy to look at that. I would remind the Constable and indeed the public that there are a small number of parking spaces on the parade side and in that vicinity that out of hours may be available. But, yes, I will look at that and get back to the Constable.

The Connétable of St. Mary:

Second supplementary, Sir, if I might, very briefly?

The Bailiff:

No, no. I think fairness dictates only one really, Constable. You can have a go at the end if we run out of questions.

5.4 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Given wearing his other hat, the Assistant Minister's apparent reputation for fearsome cost cutting, would he outline to the House what steps he has taken to reform and reduce management by giving the House examples?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I do not know if I do have a reputation for cost cutting. I have a reputation for trying to get value for money. That is exactly what we have done in changing the senior management within H.S.S. over the past 2 years. We now have a very different management team and they are performing well.

5.4.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Supplementary, Sir. Could the Assistant Minister give actual examples where there has been a reduction - a reform - which can be tabulated in monetary terms in the Health Service senior management?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I can give you example where we are going to generate an extra £200,000 of income per annum and that is through insurance companies. That is something that has been a direct result of a change in management looking at legislation that falls outside of H.S.S. but was relevant to us.

5.5 The Deputy of St. John:

Is H.S.S. looking at building a new hospital? If so, can the Assistant Minister give details of what sites are being considered and has funding also been identified and at what cost?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Some time in the next 40 years we will need a new general hospital, whether it is on its existing location or a different location. This gives me a great opportunity to remind Members and the public that we are about to issue a Green Paper on the future of Health and Social Services and I implore everybody - the public and Members alike - to take this opportunity to have a meaningful influence on our health services in the future.

5.5.1 The Deputy of St. John:

A supplementary: I am not happy with flippant answers like we have just received from the Assistant Minister. We are aware that the hospital is in great need of either being rebuilt or redesigned. Can the Minister not give us a flippant answer of some time in the next 40 years; give us an answer when things are going to happen at the hospital, please?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Work is under way with Property Holdings looking at the future capital requirements of the health service. I cannot give the Deputy the answer that he wishes because we have to go through the Green Paper. We have to look at and ask the public what type of health service they want in the future because that will dictate the type of hospital we need. Whether that hospital is built on the existing site or a new site will have to be evaluated in scope. As to timetable, parts of the hospital will need replacement sooner rather than later, but we will definitely need reinvestment and an ongoing capital programme that delivers us a sustainable, safe hospital service into the future for future generations.

5.6 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:

The Minister in reply to a question that I tabled written on 1st March this year said in the reply that certain positions within mental health were going to be re-advertised. Where is the department in re-advertising these posts, as I believe interviews are going to start to be held at the end of this month and there does not appear to have been any advertisement or re-advertisement for these posts?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I am afraid in this instance I do not know the details about when and where the advertisements were placed, but the Deputy is correct that we are actively recruiting in all areas of nursing staff

and, in particular, in mental health services. If the good Deputy would allow, I will get that information for her at some time in the next few days.

5.7 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Assistant Minister's department have a policy on addressing foodstuffs which have inherently harmful ingredients including but not limited to hydrogenated fats?

[12:30]

Will it consider perhaps introducing stricter labelling for these food products to make the public aware that they contain these unusually harmful ingredients?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I believe Jersey as elsewhere in the world is adequately served by our current legislation on labelling of food. We do not want to be in the situation where every food item coming into the Island has to be relabelled. That would not be productive or cost effective and I believe that modern standards of food labelling throughout Europe are more than adequate to meet the demands of the consumer.

5.7.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

A supplementary, if I may. It is interesting the Assistant Minister talks about different jurisdictions because many jurisdictions do ban hydrogenated fats outright; others require labelling in big letters to be put on in a similar way to cigarette packets. So could the Minister perhaps take these comments on board and just answer whether he thinks that more should be done to alert the public of the dangers of these kinds of ingredients being used?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I think we do, through the Public Health Department, a good job in trying to educate the public in healthy forms of eating and it is not just these particular potentially harmful products. We need to encourage our population to take responsibility for themselves and to look after themselves.

5.8 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

For the information of the Assistant Minister, if you have a 7.45 a.m. appointment at the hospital, you can get through the main door at the outpatients but all the internal doors are shut until about 7.50 a.m. My question is I had occasion to be in hospital recently and there were an incredible number of forms. There were the forms that I had to fill in before I went in and then 2 or 3 sets of forms when I was in hospital. Now, I would have thought that one set of forms attached to the patient would have been a great deal more efficient **[Laughter]** than 3 or 4 sets of forms with the same information, all duplicating each other. What is being done about such a time-wasting thing? I did have occasion to ...

The Bailiff:

That is your question, I think, Senator.

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

I was just going to add one tiny bit that ...

The Bailiff:

That is a very long question.

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

... in certain U.K. hospitals they have one set of forms which follow the patient round. This really is quite ridiculous. What is being done about it?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

The answer to that is that I do not know and I would welcome the Senator to give me further details and we can investigate it to see if that is a potential way of making things more efficient, thus saving money. But overall, we must maintain patient safety and so there may be a very good, valid reason why, although it takes time, it means that people are safe.

5.9 Deputy J.B. Fox of St. Helier:

There was a question earlier on about crime and security and access to the hospital by visitors. Can I ask the Assistant Minister to ring 612345. A professional crime prevention officer will resolve his problem at the other end and it is a free service and very professional. [Laughter]

5.10 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

With the amount of (j) cats. for nurses that have been talked about today, can the Assistant Minister explain what has been done in conjunction with the Education Department to grow our own nurses?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

We have a very substantial programme to grow our own nurses and it has been extremely successful, but it is not enough. We need more. We will never grow enough of our own, but we do celebrate the ones that we do manage to nurture and bring through and, boy, do they make good nurses.

5.11 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Many Jersey residents obviously have to travel to Southampton and receive excellent cancer treatment. However, can the Assistant Minister tell me is he happy with the provision available to support those very elderly and often very ill and infirm residents who have no relatives and need to travel to Southampton for such treatment?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I believe that there are services available to such individuals to ensure that they do get to their appointments comfortably and safely, but if Deputy Pitman has examples where this is not the case, then please come in, talk to us about it, and we will see if there can be further improvements made to the service. But as far as I am aware, we do provide adequate assistance.

The Bailiff:

All right, I think you have given that answer already. The Deputy of St. Peter.

5.12 Deputy C.H. Egré of St. Peter:

Further to Senator Ferguson's comments about record-keeping, a recent incident was brought to my attention where a consultant saw a patient and was unaware of records of a very important visit to the hospital some 4 weeks beforehand. Is the Assistant Minister happy with the record-keeping and the ability to access those records within the hospital environment and, if he is not, can he review it, please?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

We are implementing a new patient record computerised system. It is due to come online early next month. But again, if the Deputy has this particular instance, if he would like to come into the department in confidence and give us further details of that, we can see if it is a one-off issue or is more systematic.

The Bailiff:

Very well, that concludes Questions without notice to the Minister for Health and Social Services.