

2.5 The Deputy of St. John of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the reinstatement of the Reciprocal Health Agreement with the United Kingdom:

Following a statement in December 2010 by the Chief Minister that the Reciprocal Health Agreement would be reinstated by the end of 2010, and another statement in February 2011 by the Minister for Health and Social Services that it would be in place by the end of March 2011, when is the agreement to be signed?

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

I expect to conclude the new Reciprocal Health Agreement with the U.K. in the next few weeks. This timing was confirmed by Earl Howe, who is the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department of Health who stated in Parliament on 7th February that the U.K. expects to finalise an agreement with Jersey in the first quarter of 2011. The first parliamentary quarter ends on 5th April and both the U.K. and ourselves wish to conclude the agreement by then.

2.5.1 The Deputy of St. John:

I am very disappointed in the Minister's reply. Given now twice we have been told that it would be done by a certain date and it would appear that it is going to fall over and the reply we get "in the next few weeks". This is totally unacceptable. We were told that meetings were going to be held at a recent visit to the U.K. by our Minister to meet her counterpart over there and things would happen then. They did not and yet we are still getting today "in a few weeks' time". That is totally unacceptable. We need clarity so people can get on with their lives. Will the Minister please give us a date when this is going to happen?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I totally agree with the Deputy that I wish I could sign it as soon as I can, but my officers within the department, as well as the Chief Minister's officers, have been working hard to put this agreement together. I understand it is with Anne Milton who is the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State Department of Health, and I hope we will be signing it within the next few weeks. As I said, the parliamentary session finishes on 5th April and that is a couple of weeks away.

2.5.2 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I think we all know now that this is going to be signed but can I ask the Minister what will happen in the interim period? I think we are all agreed now that there is going to be this agreement signed. If someone has a problem in the U.K., will they be covered now or will they only be covered once the agreement has been signed?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Up until the signing of the agreement, the arrangements stand as they are, that if you need urgent treatment in A. and E. (Accident and Emergency), then that is covered. If you need more acute treatments, unless you were previously employed in the U.K. unfortunately you will have to pay for that.

2.5.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Can the Minister explain the reasons for the delay and can she confirm that the agreement will not lead to any funding benefit to either party, i.e. each side will cover the costs incurred by their citizens in each jurisdiction?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Yes, this is a new agreement and it is the same as the Isle of Man agreement, and Jersey residents will be treated as if they are U.K. residents and *vice versa*. Why it has taken so long is that the Department of Health has to go through a formal consultation and those devolved administrations with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

2.5.4 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Notwithstanding the excellent health which the Minister appears to possess after her break, could she confirm that the scope will be precisely the scope of the past agreement and that, for example, if someone requires a very long hospitalisation in the U.K. that this will indeed be part of the agreement?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Yes, it is as if a U.K. resident is a U.K. resident and *vice versa*. The only difference in this new Reciprocal Health Agreement is that it does not cover the costs if you need to be repatriated in the event an Islander is taken ill in the U.K. and is unable to return to Jersey on a conventional flight or by sea. So therefore travel insurance, which is probably good common sense anyhow because it will not cover costs of losing your bags, *et cetera*, will still be needed in some cases.

2.5.5 The Deputy of St. John:

Is the Minister aware that many people cannot get insurance and, given her last reply, it means that people who are seriously ill and cannot travel by scheduled aircraft will have to pick up large bills in chartering a private aircraft or find other means of getting back to Jersey at great expense when people are seriously ill, and does she think this is really acceptable?

The Deputy of Trinity:

This is a new Health Reciprocal Agreement, the same as the Isle of Man. We have been without one for a couple of years and I quite agree it has been totally unsatisfactory, and we are now very close to signing and I think that is a really good point.

[10:15]

I know a lot of Islanders have contacted me asking about reciprocal health, especially with families in the U.K. who wish to come and see their families there. It was not right but this agreement will go a long way to making sure that residents who go to the U.K. will not have to pay for any treatments.

2.5.6 The Deputy of St. John:

A follow-up if I may. Is the hiccup being caused by her department, the Chief Minister's Department or in the U.K.?

The Deputy of Trinity:

He seems to want to blame everybody. This takes time and, as I have said, it goes not only with the Department of Health but it goes with other devolved governments. This is not just with the U.K. It is including Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and so their consultation has to go out to those devolved governments and, like with any government, it does take time.