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3.4 Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding action being taken to help people who suffer from drug addiction:

Will the Minister advise Members what action his department is taking to help people who suffer from drug addiction, and in particular those who require methadone or Subutex treatment, giving details of the estimated number of addicts needing this treatment and the number of people receiving it?

Senator A.K.F. Green (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

The methadone/Subutex programme delivered by Alcohol and Drug Services has a capacity for 120 clients annually. Research recently undertaken on the nature, the extent and the consequences of illicit drug use in Jersey estimated that there are approximately 892 problem drug users. We have a shared care approach between Alcohol and Drug Service and G.P.s in order to increase treatment across the Island and allow access to the hidden population of drug users. There are currently plans to introduce that shared care service fairly shortly. There is currently a waiting list of approximately 20 waiting to access the system and I am hoping that the shared care provision will help with that.

3.4.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Supplementary. I thank the Minister for the figures. He talks of a capacity for 120. My own information seems to indicate it is 100 receiving treatment and that if new users come along they have to wait until someone else comes off the scheme before they can be admitted to it. So my concern is that we are not adequately covering the needs of the drug users and trying to diminish the problem that we have. Can the Minister tell me what the budget is for this area for Subutex and methadone and whether it is going up, down, or what, or what it has done over the last few years and especially in the Medium Term Financial Plan?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

I cannot answer the latter part of the question although I am happy to get that figure for the Deputy and forward it to all States Members. The Deputy says that there is a gap between those who want the service and those who are getting the service, and he is correct, and for that reason we are introducing the shared care system. Health and Social Services working with specialist services with 2 specialist GPs in a care shared way, and I believe that that will help those who have to wait at the moment to access the system. I do not have the figures on the budget I am afraid.

3.4.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Just to confirm, could the Minister state whether the provision of Subutex and methadone is dictated by budget rather than by medical need at the moment?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

Access to the service that we are providing is dictated by clinical need although some people are waiting a short time at the moment to get into that service and that is why we are introducing a shared care system, working with G.P.s, to widen the possibility that people get the clinical support that they need. It is not one of budget.

3.4.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

So if people are waiting longer than they need for this particular medication, is it because there is not enough money in the pot currently and how does the Minister envisage that the shared care proposals will resolve this issue?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

Because we will have more qualified professionals able to provide the service.

3.4.4 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Just following on from Deputy Tadier, my understanding is that the budget for this area has not been changed for the last 10 years and yet drug use is not going down. What the Minister should recognise is that the same survey that I think he, perhaps, may have been referring to earlier, showed that 16 per cent of users funded their habit by theft because they cannot get it through the system. Another 32 users funded their drug use by selling drugs. So is it not a self-defeating policy that if we do not provide enough money to cover the official system whereby they can get it without resorting to crime or selling drugs, that we are causing problems elsewhere? Does the Minister not agree? But, first of all, what about the budget?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

The Deputy tells me that the figures have not gone up for 10 years but that is just a very crude statement. I do not know whether he is right or he is wrong. What matters is the outcomes that come from the money that we invest in the service and that is why we carried out the survey. That is why we are going for a shared care approach with G.P.s and with Drug and Alcohol Service. That is why we intend to get better value for money and treat the people that need treating. Whether people get treatment or not should be determined by their clinical needs.