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3.3 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding meetings held with representatives of workers affected by funding cuts to Family Nursing and Home Care: [9694]

What meetings, if any, has the Minister had with the representatives of the workers who will be affected by his decision to cut funding for Family Nursing and Home Care?

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

I have not had any meetings with the representatives of the workers affected, nor would it be appropriate for me to do so. I have said previously, decisions about services and staffing arrangements are a matter and properly a matter for Family Nursing and Home Care.

3.3.1 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

But of course the decisions he make will have a real tangible effect on the service that this organisation provides, a service that is valued by virtually everybody in this community but most importantly, those workers and their representatives want to meet with the Minister to talk about this. Simply out of courtesy, would it not be a good idea to get round the table and just have a chat with them about it or is that honestly beyond his abilities to somehow muster?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

There is only one point I agree with the Deputy with in his question, that the Family Nursing services are essential, they are valued and they are much loved in this Island. We are working with Family Nursing to modernise the service and it is a challenge for them but they are taking that role seriously. The Unite official asked me to meet to discuss it and I stand by what I said originally. However, he also said to me that I had made different comments; different or contrary to those made by Family Nursing. I did offer to answer any questions he put to me on the clear understanding that I would reply to him and copy it to Family Nursing. We are not in a dispute with Family Nursing. Family Nursing and I are working together to improve services, to provide better services to change the way things are done going into the future.

3.3.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Minister believe that the prospect of major changes to terms and conditions in Family Nursing and Home Care is a serious concern and worry to the employees in that particular organisation, and does he consider that changes in terms of conditions may well affect the safe practices and good quality of practice that currently exist within Family Nursing and Home Care?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

Dealing with the last part of the question first. No, I do not consider changes in terms and conditions to put at risk patients. That is what the Deputy is, in essence, asking me. The services are properly regulated and controlled. We are about to appoint a Care Commissioner, so I am comfortable in that respect. But managing change is always difficult. Family Nursing are facing up to the challenge that they have to. Of course it is difficult for the staff. The services are much valued. The staff are much valued. But they have to be allowed to work their way through the solution. I might add, that I met on Friday with the chief executive and the chairman of Family Nursing. We had an excellent meeting. We have agreed though that they might need a little longer to manage the change they are having to go through. So I have agreed that we will not seek to make any change until July next year.

3.3.3 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Does the Minister not agree that Family Nursing and Home Care provide an absolutely essential service with regards to care in the community? Will he not also agree that things regarding privatisation, for want of a better word, is happening in the U.K. where things are going south at a rate of knots and that we must not let this happen in Jersey?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

I totally agree with the Member. That is why we are fully funding district nursing. Fully funding health visiting. Fully funding reablement. Fully funding rapid response. Fully funding Children's Services, including a new palliative care service. When the budget is worked out, Family Nursing will have a figure very similar to the one they have currently got. The only change will be around home care, which I am not going to continue to pay way over market rate for that service. Family Nursing are an excellent organisation but they are trying to take their service through modernisation to meet the needs of an ageing population and I am supporting them fully in that role.

3.3.4 Deputy R.J. Renouf of St. Ouen:

Would the Minister elaborate on the statement he made just a few minutes ago that he is not making any changes until July? Does this mean that the grant to Family Nursing will continue for the first part of next year until July at the same levels as the grant has been in this current year?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

That is what we are discussing. It is likely to be yes.

3.3.5 The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Has the decision been made? The Minister indicated before that he will not be making any changes until July; what exactly does that mean?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

What I said was I had met with Family Nursing, we have had an excellent meeting, and we are looking at July as the possible start date next year. We are still in discussions with Family Nursing.

3.3.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

I do not know if I am allowed to ask the Minister whether his comments are disingenuous when he says that Family Nursing are trying to modernise and he is taking them through that.

The Deputy Bailiff:

No.

Deputy M. Tadier:

But if that is not ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

That suggestion of disingenuous is not an appropriate ...

Deputy M. Tadier:

So I withdraw that. I would simply say: is it not incorrect when the Minister stands up in this Assembly to say: "Family nursing want to go through a modernisation process and I am simply there to help them"? The reality is that the Minister and the Council of Ministers want the Family Nursing to "modernise" to save money and that they are being pressurised to do that and there is great resistance from Family Nursing and from the public because they are scared about what might happen to that much valued and effective service that currently exists.

Senator A.K.F. Green:

He only people causing scare and concern is Deputy Tadier and the like because what we are doing here is we have increased expenditure on reablement. We have increased expenditure on rapid response. We have supported Family Nursing in providing a new Children's Service, including palliative care. This is about change to meet the modern society. Not about fear.

3.3.7 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Does the Minister not realise that the Home Care, which is more than just going round doing a bit of dusting, is an essential part of Family Nursing and to increase the rate from £11 an hour to £19 an hour is going to take it out of the reach of quite a lot of old-age pensioners? When he is busy saying: "We must look after our oldies in the home" and then he is taking this service away. What has he to say to that?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

First of all, I take exception to being called an "oldie". I am a pensioner myself and I do not consider myself to be an "oldie". But anyway, answering the question that the Senator asked: why should they pay £19 an hour when they can get it for £12? That is precisely what modernisation is about.

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Sorry, I do not understand his comment.

Senator A.K.F. Green:

I asked a rhetorical question is why should service users pay £19 an hour when they can get it for £12? That is what this change is about.

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

No, it is not.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Sorry, Senator, firstly, this is not an opportunity for argument or debate. It is an opportunity for asking questions and receiving information or asking for action. Secondly, you have had a supplementary to your original question.

3.3.8 Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier:

I thought Senator Ferguson was going to ask my question; in a way she did. I am concerned: is the Minister for Health and Social Services saying the strategy is to keep elderly people in their homes as long as possible? The arms are nursing, but the home care part must be as equal. If I am elderly and a nurse is going to be coming in and doing my dressing but nobody is going to do my work or my shopping I cannot stay in my own home. Does the Minister not understand the equality that he should be - which is quite frightening that he is not - taking the home care part of staying in your own home for as long as possible?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

I totally understand. I do not think the Deputy understands there is no need to pay £19 an hour for a service that should be £12. The service will still be provided.

3.3.9 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

In an answer to a previous question, the Minister cast aspersions against Deputy Southern saying that he was the one causing the fear here when in actual fact Deputy Southern was doing nothing

other than relay the concerns that the workers for this service have put to him directly, put to me directly, Deputy Tadier and Senator Ferguson. Again I ask a question he is not even listening to it, so I do not know why I am bothering. It would be good if he might like to indicate that he is listening or ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy, firstly, please could we not have a discussion across the floor of the Chamber ...

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Well maybe the Minister should listen to questions when they are put to Ministers.

The Deputy Bailiff:

... and, secondly, you have not asked a question yet.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I am in the process of asking a question. This is what this is for and Ministers do not listen and you stand up for them as usual. **[Members: Oh!]** So I ask ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy, I must ask you...

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Can I ask my question, Sir?

The Deputy Bailiff:

I must ask you firstly to sit down because I am talking. Secondly, I must ask you to withdraw the allegations against the Chair; that the Chair is favouring one side over the other. That is simply not the case. Yes, now you may ask your question.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I will withdraw that if I am able to ask my question and the Minister will bother to listen to it, can we proceed on that basis?

The Deputy Bailiff:

It is not a question of ... I have invited you to ask your question, please do.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Will the Minister agree that if he met with the workers for this service he would be able to proceed from a position of strength because he would understand the concerns they have made, concerns which they uniquely have, which are not shared by the Chief Executive? I know that there is a difference of opinion between those workers. That is the point that Deputy Southern was trying to get across. Would he accept that his position would be strengthened if he met these workers and their representatives face to face, and if he accepts that point I am more than happy to facilitate that meeting for him? Would he not agree?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

It is just not appropriate for me to meet directly with employees of other organisations. I am sorry, but that is the case. By the way, I do withdraw the comment I made. It was not about Deputy Southern, I think I said Deputy Tadier. So I withdraw that comment.