

4.2 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding nursing vacancy rates in the hospital: [1(575)]

Will the Minister provide Members with the latest nursing vacancy rates in the hospital and state how many nursing shifts were filled by agency or bank staff or both in the first three-quarters of 2017?

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

Dealing with the first part of the question first. Vacancy rate for nurses in the hospital was in March at 12 per cent. Today it is slightly improved at 11.5. But this does mask the true position. We have 29 new starters since March. We have another 32 nurses who have been offered and accepted posts and in the process of working their notice. We have 23 roles up for interview. If they all start we will be at full establishment. This has been due to a different way of engaging with a recruitment agency due to innovative ways of recruiting, using digital platforms, social media, high profile attendance at recruitment fairs in London, Manchester, and the most successful was Lisbon. The second part of the question was about the use of bank nurses and agencies; 4,732 shifts on bank and 5,011 shifts on agency.

4.2.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I am just making a note of those figures and wondering how they correspond to my own figures which suggest that some 600 nursing shifts per week are being manned either by agency workers with little understanding of how things operate on the ward or by bank nurses doing overtime, and the question is how do his figures fit with the figure in the middle of this year of 600 shifts per week, which is equivalent to something like 90 staff.

Senator A.K.F. Green:

I am not here to answer the Deputy's figures. The figures I have come from the H.R. (Human Resources) Department and are the correct ones. If the Deputy has different figures then that is for him to justify that. With regard to bank workers, they are not *ad hoc* agency workers. They are our employees who have an agreement with us to work as and when required. It is an arrangement that suits both of us. I resent the comment that bank and agency staff are less competent than other staff. **[Approbation]**

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

Could the Minister outline the new ways of working with the recruitment agency that he briefly mentioned then and what learning he has gained from that?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

The biggest learning - and I am not involved in the recruitment - but from speaking to the H.R. Department and the chief nurse, the biggest learning was the use of social media before attending a recruitment fair. So it did not just turn up at a recruitment fair and hope to catch people that were there. They let people know well in advance they were going to be there. When I say "people", the sort of people that we would want to recruit, trained nurses in other hospitals, using Facebook and Twitter. Letting people know that we will be there and we have posts to fill and we were looking for good people to come to Jersey. So it was not just taking a chance on people arriving at the fair looking for a job; it was priming them to think about looking for a job in Jersey.

4.2.3 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

How does the Minister monitor the level of overtime that is done by bank staff and how does he judge whether the levels of overtime that they are undertaking is appropriate?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

The Minister does not monitor it personally. This is an operational matter for the H.R. Department and for the managers, line managers, in the department. What I do do is get regular reports which tell me if I have got a problem in terms of recruitment and vacancies. We have just shown Members it is a challenge to fill posts but the new way of doing it means that if those 20 posts or so - 23 roles - are filled in the near future and everybody turns up as promised, we will have a full establishment.

4.2.4 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Given the situation at the moment with the vacancy rate does the Minister have any reason to be concerned at the level of overtime that is being done by bank staff, whether or not he is personally monitoring it, but from the information that he is given is he concerned at the levels of overtime and whether that is appropriate to be taken in Jersey?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

Let us put it in context, it is considerably better than last year. Last year we spent a lot more on bank staff and on agency staff. That is a trend going in the right direction.

4.2.5 Deputy J.A. Hilton of St. Helier:

Members will be well aware of a national shortage of nurses and medical staff. What difference does the Minister believe a key worker policy would make to recruiting additional staff?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

I thank the Deputy for her question and she knows the answer that I will give this. It will help. It is something that is being worked on at the present time.

4.2.6 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

Has the Minister got the timetable for the implementation of the key worker policy?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

No, but it is being worked on along with the rightful partners, husbands have the right - or wives, spouses if you like have the right - to work if their other half is employed as a member of staff across the board. But partners do not automatically have the right to look for employment. Those sort of things are issues that are being sorted.

4.2.7 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Can I ask for an answer to my previous question, which is about whether he has cause to be concerned about the levels of overtime? But could I ask for an answer that does not refer to the context of last year but refers to the context of here and now, irrespective of what the rates were last year? Is he concerned about the levels of overtime being undertaken by staff today?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

No, I am not concerned. Of course I want to see it reduced because it is cheaper and better for the staff that we have lower levels of overtime. But in context to last year it is greatly improved. Surely that is an encouraging situation.

4.2.8 Deputy G.P. Southern:

In the context that any figure above 5 per cent for vacancy rate in nursing is considered problematic, will the Minister explain what the figure was last year and what his target is for getting the vacancy rate down to 5 per cent in the coming years?

[10:00]

Senator A.K.F. Green:

I thought I had already answered this question. In March it was 12 per cent, it is now 11.5 per cent. We have offered posts to another 32 nurses who have accepted them and are working their notice. We are actively fulfilling the process of filling 23 roles. If all those people come in post we will be at full establishment. Even with our vacancy factor of 11.5 that is considerably better than the U.K. (United Kingdom), it is not good enough for Jersey though.