

2019.03.12

10 Deputy K.G. Pamplin of St. Saviour of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the action taken to combat staff shortages in the care sector: [OQ.70/2019]

As we have been hearing and following the news that the charity, Les Amis, says it has been trying to meet healthcare demands with limited staff resources for a long time, will the Minister advise what he is doing to address this situation, in order to combat care staff shortages across all sectors?

The Deputy of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

The provision of care to the elderly and vulnerable in the Island is an issue affecting our whole community and economy and over recent years a growing home-care market has emerged, with many businesses being established and offering their services to users of home care. These are independent businesses and the role of Government is to ensure that they are regulated, to provide care of a high standard. From time to time, providers have withdrawn from the market and others have stepped in to take on clients no longer serviced by those withdrawing. In the instance of Les Amis, the role of my department has been to co-ordinate agencies, to ensure continued provision and I do believe that other providers are ready to step in and take on Les Amis' clients. My department will work with all parties concerned, to ensure a smooth transition. It should be noted that Jersey trains care professionals at Highlands College. There is a government skills programme, which supports entry-level training of new recruits to the home care sector. These can be school leavers, but they can also be retirees, or career-changers.

6.10.1 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

I thank the Minister for his answer. Just focusing on charities, will the Minister call together the group of collective care responsibility charities, who for many years now have - for example, Les Amis and Jersey Cheshire Home - to ensure that they have been properly taken through the process of regulation coming through in what has been a trying year for charities, with the introduction of G.D.P.R. (General Data Protection Regulation) and the Charities Commissioner, to ensure that they are supported through this transitional period?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

To the Deputy, that is a question about the regulation of care requirements that are coming into force, which is a matter for the Jersey Care Commission. I do not have any influence over how those regulations might be put in place, or enforced in the future. But, of course, if charities wish to approach me and think I am in a position to assist them, I am very willing to hear from them. Les Amis did not approach us, in this instance, before making their announcement and I am not aware of any other charities, who have asked to do so.

6.10.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister mentioned local training, does he expect that to meet the shortfall of trained workers in this area and whether, or not, he does, what conversations has he had with H.A.W.A.G. (Housing and Work Advisory Group) in terms of improving the situation for care workers?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

The Deputy refers to a shortfall and that begs the question as to whether there is a shortfall; that is yet, I think, to be proved. We cannot say that merely because one provider has chosen to change its way it delivers its care, it means that the whole sector is suffering. But, my understanding of the use

of carers, who might come in from outside of Jersey is that the providers, typically, might have a number of registered posts, which they can recruit into, but that it is rare that a care assistant is recruited on a licensed basis. If care providers feel that there is a need for more flexibility, I know they would approach H.A.W.A.G. and seek that latitude. I am not aware whether that is happening at the moment. There is, I understand, the Jersey Care Federation, which represents all providers, whose purpose is to support the recruitment and training of new carers, among other things and they would be best placed to bring forward any representations.

6.10.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

The Director of Les Amis has said, on record, that due to a lack of available and qualified staff, they will cease to operate their community outreach and short break services from the end of the month. Does the Minister believe that statement? Does he take that statement at face value? Why does he understand that they are having difficulty in finding staff?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I accept that Les Amis have had difficulty, because they have said so. I do not know how Les Amis have recruited, or what specific difficulties they might have encountered, because they have not come to meet with me or, I believe, others in the department to discuss that. They have chosen the path they have announced and that is a matter for them, as an independent charity, not any body under my jurisdiction.

6.10.4 Deputy R.J. Ward:

May I ask the Minister: is he at ease with the use of the word “market” in the context of the care sector, given that in any market there is competition, where you inevitably have winners, but you will also have losers?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

This whole question has been about the provision of carers, to service the vulnerable in the Island, to meet their care needs. That necessary provision is safeguarded by the requirements of the Jersey Care Commission for carers to be trained and have adequate qualifications and around the working conditions that they are employed on and that is the means by which we ensure delivery of care services. I do not believe it is right to talk about losers in this context.

6.10.5 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

My focus here is on charities; charities have a model where the money that they bring in to do the services that we are so thankful that they do, is reliant on the goodwill of the Island in fundraising and long-term planning, looking for grants and sponsorship. With that matter that Les Amis have announced that they do not have the funds to provide one service, is he as concerned as I am that other charities may be in similar positions and, in that case, will he urge to meet with all health-based charities, providing care services, to ensure they are not in trouble and can talk to them about long-term funding?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Yes, I would support consultation and regular contact with all charities. I believe there is a need for charities to have a central forum which can bring issues to Government. This is played, in part, by the Jersey Disability Partnership thus far, but that does not really fit all charities. I think, maybe, Government has a role to help charities to get together and set up their forum, which can then speak to Government about strategic issues and I would try and give every support to that.