

20.11.17

11 Deputy K.G. Pamplin of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the impact on mental health of the recent rise in Covid-19 infections (OQ.331/2020):

Given the measures to be used to combat the recent rise in COVID-19 infections on the Island, will the Minister advise what plan, or enhanced plan, is in place to combat the effects of mental health and to support those with mental illness, both in and out of a care environment?

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

As an Island we need to be flexible and responsive to advice from the deputy medical officer of health to contain the virus. There appear to be 2 elements to this question, firstly, in relation to combatting the effects of mental health within our community. H.C.S. is part of a network of services, which include both the private and third sector and we will continue our support for the Listening Lounge, which saw an uplift in demand over the lockdown period. We will continue to operate our mental health liaison team, the home treatment team and the mental health contact team. We will continue working closely with all other services and stakeholders in the private and third sector. In relation to the delivery of acute services, there has been very substantial learning during the pandemic period. We know we need to keep essential front line services running to support service users and prevent situations becoming more acute. We have developed audio-visual technology capability within our teams and we are able to provide community service users with telephone and video link support. We would also work to ensure that processes for referral into services are maintained and inpatient services will continue to be provided by a dedicated staff team with support from all others in adult mental health.

4.11.1 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

I thank the Minister for his answer. In relation to Islanders who are in isolation due to the impacts that the infection could have on their health, does he agree with me that the messaging that is given out at any time from press conferences to social media posts to how the media is delivered, the importance on their mental health, even the wording of advice that is given out could have a detrimental effect on their mental health if not carefully provided?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

We are very conscious of the effects of self-isolation, necessary though it is. We do not want to imperil people's well-being or mental health.

[11:00]

To that end, the communication is very carefully thought through. I would invite the Deputy, and I know he would always want to take this up and I am sure he does, that if he has ideas on better ways of communicating we will always be receptive to them. I would just also remind the Deputy of the Connect Me service, which is available to anybody who is feeling under stress at this time and is a route through to all the help that might be available.

4.11.2 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Could the Minister advise the Assembly, when deciding upon particular measures to take to combat COVID-19, whether the department or S.T.A.C. (Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell) or any other organisation within the Government undertake a mental health assessment of the likely effects of those measures? For instance, a recent announcement that years 11, 12 and 13 in schools have to wear masks, when other children clearly do not, has the potential to make those children feel

stigmatised and to blame, this in itself can have an effect on their mental health. Would the Minister advise whether they do a proper mental health assessment of the measures that they impose?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

There is detailed and significant consideration by policy officers and S.T.A.C. If the Deputy is thinking of a long, detailed document consisting of many pages being a mental health assessment, no, I do not see that in most of the measures we need to discuss. Because, of course, very often we are reacting with a degree of urgency. But the head of Mental Health Services does sit within S.T.A.C. and does advise on mental health implications of possible decisions and it is something that is in the forefront of all considerations within S.T.A.C. We treat mental health as having parity with physical health. As to the children in masks, that measure is fully supported by the Minister for Education and her department. I do not see any reason why the older children should feel at all impacted and there will be support for them. I believe they understand the reason and the good preventative measure that wearing masks will be.

4.11.3 Deputy K.F. Morel:

It is good to hear that the head of mental health is involved in S.T.A.C. Is the Minister advising somebody whether a children's mental health expert is involved in that advice-making process within S.T.A.C. because obviously children have different mental health needs, particularly teenagers, and somebody with the overall view may not focus enough on young people in that situation?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

S.T.A.C. has the ability to call on all advice and expertise it considers necessary, so it would draw from specialist services, such as within C.A.M.H.S. if it believed that advice was needed.

4.11.4 The Very Reverend M.R. Keirle, B.A., Dean of Jersey:

Will the Minister not agree that the recent reduction of numbers for people attending faith community gatherings whereby the restrictions allow for restaurants and venues to serve any number of people with a small building 7 days a week but where a once-a-week gathering of 40 people in a large well-ventilated church is not allowed, can only reduce the mental well-being of those within this community as we approach Christmas? Would he consider working with S.T.A.C. to review the restrictions regarding faith community restrictions?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

It is the case that this advice on gatherings, of course, emanates from S.T.A.C. The fact of the matter is that people gathering in a place of worship are there for a common purpose, so they do constitute a gathering. I do understand the Dean's point that, yes, they often socially distance and the like. The difficulty is that were we to make an exception for churches because church leaders believe that their congregations are well behaved, then the same might be said about sports clubs or all sorts of other organisations, which would negate entirely the point about gatherings. The evidence worldwide is that gatherings have been a source of infection, we know that from other countries. The question of restaurants and other venues, if the Dean considers that there has been sort of risky behaviour there, legislation I am bringing forward will allow enforcement officers to enforce rules in that area. There will be a requirement that tables in restaurants should be not more than 10 and each table is a separate gathering, which does not mix with others. It is a complex area. It gives me

no pleasure to make these sort of restrictions and I hope that we will be able to bring them to an end as soon as we can.

4.11.5 The Dean of Jersey:

Could the Minister provide details of how many clusters of COVID-19 have resulted from people attending church or can he please get that information available to me?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I am not aware locally of any clusters arising from members attending church. The question is: do we wait until problems have arisen that people have become ill and then we decide to do something or do we draw on evidence from other jurisdictions who have gone through this in the past and learn from them and try and act at a stage where we can limit the spread of infection?

4.11.6 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

I thank Members and the Dean for joining in the question time. My final question is related to finances. If a project came forward from those who support people with mental health, either be it in the charity sector or within his own department, does he have money available to him or would he be able to sort those extra resources if they were requested to support Islanders' mental health during the next period if required?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

There continues to be substantial investment in mental health services, both in the last Government Plan and in the one that we will be debating next month; that is not to say that there is spare money floating about which is unallocated. But, of course, if the Deputy or any other organisation has a business plan to put forward which involves H.C.S., then we will give it full and proper consideration with a view to bringing enhanced services forward as soon as we can.