

2020.03.24

4 Deputy K.G. Pamplin of St. Saviour of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the impact on staff at the Hospital of the Coronavirus situation: (OQ.83/2020)

I am very glad I put on my thermals this morning. Sorry for that image, everybody. Will the Minister explain how it is planned to mitigate the impact on staff at the hospital, both in terms of their workload and their well-being, in the event that they have to deal with a large volume of cases requiring critical care during the current coronavirus situation?

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

I thank the Deputy for his question because first of all I want to thank, from the bottom of my heart, the hospital staff who are presently working above and beyond **[Approbation]** to save Islanders' lives. From the very beginning of this crisis, we recognised that the strain on our staffing was going to be considerable and we needed to do all we could to safeguard their well-being and mental health. So many initiatives have been taken to build up the well-being of staff at the hospital. A strategy and a plan has been developed and is being distributed to staff this week. Already, posters which are headed "Self-care during COVID-19. It's OK not to be OK" are being distributed across the hospital. It relays the message and it reminds and reassures staff that, for example, they should make time to unwind. They should consider their own care and well-being and seek out ways to manage their psychological well-being. To assist the staff in that we have resource. We have 150 mental health first aiders, we have a trauma management team, we have counsellors and clinical psychologists. But we have also created a well-being area for critical care staff, we are setting up a helpline for staff, fruit and water are being placed in the ward areas for them. We are seeing if we can extend the provision of hot meals later into the day for them. We are identifying nursery provisions, recognising the anxiety that some may have over school closures. Those are among a number of measures.

3.4.1 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

I thank the Minister for his answer and also the Minister himself for supporting our Scrutiny Panel and being available to us answering many questions, as this is, of course, a health emergency; so I thank the Minister. I also thank him for what he has just said in terms of mental health. He is speaking my language and that is going to be very reassuring. To help also mitigate the impact on our staff at the General Hospital, how will this extend to our primary care front line in bringing together our entire health and social care providers on this Island, so they equally can support each other and through some of the initiatives you have just outlined?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

It will extend to our primary care colleagues working with us and all across the healthcare sector in the Island. Because what I see and no doubt later in questions without notice it may come around as a topic, that the arrangements are now being put in place with the primary care providers who are going to be part of the combined effort within the healthcare system to provide care in this crisis.

3.4.2 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Has the Minister considered asking for volunteers from the university cohorts returning to the Island, which might help with assisting the medical response and lightening the load?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I will consider that. It may well have been considered within the Department. I will find out and liaise with the Deputy. I will also discuss that with the Minister for Education how we can access those.

3.4.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Will the Minister, as a matter of urgency, consider as one assistance for healthcare workers to remove parking charges for them, particularly when they are working all hours under the sun and if they are in self-isolation? Indeed, for anyone in self-isolation. So, we take one small worry away; receiving a parking ticket at this time when they are working I think would be a slap in the face. It is completely unnecessary.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I can understand the Deputy's point. I have a note here that has been provided for me that we are looking at parking arrangements, so I do not know if that is removing charges. I hope so. We recognise that there are a lot of people who are not filling the car parks, so it could be that Patriotic Street would have a floor or more reserved for them, I hope free of charge. I will speak about that with the Minister for Infrastructure.

3.4.4 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Could the Minister make it very simple; give every healthcare worker a simple card they put in their window and parking attendants realise that is a healthcare worker? It is simply that and tape it on the car. It is so simple.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Yes, that would seem a simple answer and I hope it can be implemented that simply.

3.4.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

What consideration has the Minister given to reducing to zero the charge made by G.P.s (general practitioners) for consultations with those suffering from coronavirus?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

That has been discussed. That is what I would wish to happen. That has been part of the proposal discussed with the G.P.s and we have had a good response from the G.P.s, so for those people who may be suffering, may have contracted the virus, who may be at risk with underlying conditions, the proposal is - and I cannot say this is yet cast in stone and firmly agreed - that no charge would be made to them if they need to call on primary care.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

That gives me an answer.

3.4.6 Deputy I. Gardiner:

Just as elective surgery procedures and G.P. visits are down in the numbers, some of the essential employees have now less workload; not the front line medical staff, for example, who work in the labs. So can the Minister advise if they have been considering to do the rota and keep the people who are not essential now in the reserve that might be essential in the future?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Yes, I can assure the Deputy that staff who have worked in elective surgery, the non-urgent roles, in fact all staff are being repurposed to address this issue. There is additional training going on for staff, so that they can do a different job, in many instances, to address the pressures that we know could well build up in the hospital. There is good planning around this.

3.4.7 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Does the Minister also agree with me that this window that we have in flattening the curve is also the opportunity to ensure that our healthcare and social care providers can have the proper kit and proper resources in place, as we are seeing across the United Kingdom and as we are seeing across the world, to protect our front line to make sure they have the P.P.E. and also the facilities and the support in place is also critical of why this window is so important? Yes, as Dr. Muscat has explained, but equally we have got to make sure that our healthcare and front line staff have what they need. If there is a risk that they do not have that need, that measures will be taken so we can do something to self-isolate, or whatever the suggestions will come about, to give our healthcare the time to get what they need. Because we have one hospital, one healthcare system, one shot at this; does the Minister agree?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I do agree. Kit is available and more is on order. I have no reason to believe that healthcare staff will be placed in danger as a result of a lack of kit.