

21.05.11

8 Deputy D. Johnson of St. Mary of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding return of dental practices to pre-pandemic procedures (OQ.112/2021)

Will the Minister advise whether, having regard to the number of COVID-19 cases in the Island, there are any immediate plans to allow dental practices to return to their pre-pandemic procedures in terms of the number of patients in waiting rooms, standards of P.P.E. (personal protective equipment) required and the period of fallow times between patients? If not, why not?

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

At this stage, a return to pre-pandemic levels of activity in dental surgeries is not recommended. The Government continues to follow a cautious approach with a mix of mitigations to minimise risk of COVID transmission and this includes physical distancing of 2 metres, where possible, or at least one metre, use of masks, optimum ventilation requirements and standardised P.P.E. requirements for the protection of staff and patients. The guidance for these mitigations is based on known risks from new variants of COVID and emerging evidence of COVID being spread through airborne transmission. Specifically, the standards for P.P.E. are set in accordance with Public Health England and are approved by dental professionals based at the General Hospital. The guidance on fallow periods between patients is also in line with Public Health England. It is a risk-based approach requiring an assessment of ventilation arrangements in the dental surgery, a patient's COVID status and the procedures required, including high-risk aerosol generating procedures.

[11:45]

As with all public health guidance, dental guidance is kept under ongoing review to ensure that approaches are proportionate to risk.

The Deputy of St. Mary:

Can I have a supplementary, please?

The Bailiff:

Beg your pardon, Deputy. I am not doing extremely well on supplementary questions at the moment. Deputy of St. Mary, a supplementary question, of course.

2.8.1 The Deputy of St. Mary:

I thank the Minister for his answer, but does he not accept that dental practitioners are, by virtue of their own professional expertise and qualifications, acutely aware of the potential dangers caused by the pandemic and by aerosols, in particular? Will he advise to what extent S.T.A.C. (Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell) or those responsible for monitoring the situation have sought to consult the Jersey Dental Association on the issue?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I accept, as the Deputy states, the competence and professionalism of dentists. Public health have consulted not just with the Jersey Dental Association, but with all dentists, because not all dentists are represented by the association.

2.8.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

What is the Minister's best estimate of when we might see dental services returned to normal? Is it his intention to build back better on the core services that we have, especially for young people?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I do not have a precise date. This will depend on advice coming through, looking first perhaps at Public Health England guidance and then looking locally to medical and dental professionals. The Deputy rather enlarges the question, but yes, of course we do seek to improve on dental services and particularly for children wherever possible.

2.8.3 The Deputy of St. Mary:

If I could just respond on the comment made on membership of the Jersey Dental Association, which has been raised numerous times before, it is accepted that maybe not 100 per cent of the dentists are members, but it is the case that all dentist practices ...

The Bailiff:

Deputy, this does have to be a question. It has to be a supplementary question.

The Deputy of St. Mary:

My question therefore is: does the Minister accept that a continuation of the present measures in the improved situation we are now in is adversely impacting on the operation of dental practices in terms of both the number of patients they are able to see and costs, which will in turn be passed on to the patients? Will he therefore please undertake to arrange for S.T.A.C. or any other body responsible for liaison to contact the J.D.A. (Jersey Dental Association) as a matter of priority with a view to discussing with them what measures might now be relaxed?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I note the Deputy refers to this as adverse impacts. Of course there will be adverse financial impacts on the dentists, that I must accept, but of course they are mitigations for the sake of safety of both dentists and their staff and patients. Until professionals feel it is safe to do so, I cannot say that those mitigations will be removed, but as I have said, guidance is kept under ongoing review and I will ask the public health team to maintain their contact with dentists, including the dental association.