

21.02.09

**14 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the provision of personal protective equipment (P.P.E.) for healthcare workers (OQ.39/2021)**

In the light of recent reports that healthcare workers surrounded by coughing patients are at greater risk of contracting COVID-19 than first thought, is it the Minister's assessment that healthcare staff are provided with an appropriately high level of P.P.E. (personal protective equipment), including F.F.P.3 (filtering face piece) respirator masks; and will he commit to providing front line staff in non-intensive hospital areas, G.P. surgeries and care homes with such masks?

**Deputy R.J. Renouf of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):**

P.P.E. is provided by the Government for relevant staff groups according to Public Health England guidance, upon which local guidance is based.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

I can hardly understand what the Minister is saying. There is interference.

**The Bailiff:**

I wonder if you can find a way of speaking slightly more loudly or closer to the microphone or something like that, Minister, because it is quite difficult to hear you. If you could start your answer again that would be helpful, I think.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Yes, I am sorry. I hope this will be clearer.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

There is an echo, a severe echo.

**The Bailiff:**

I wonder if I could ask all Members not speaking to turn off their microphones, if they have not already done so. It could be my microphone; that has not been a problem until now. I shall mute it for the time being, if you would like to speak, Minister.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

P.P.E. is provided by the Government for relevant staff groups according to Public Health England guidance, upon which our local guidance is based. This guidance does not currently advise the use of F.F.P.3 masks in all healthcare settings. Protection against COVID-19 needs to be multi-layered and proportionate. P.P.E. is just one way of protecting staff at work. Regular COVID screening of patients and staff, handwashing, social distancing, training, workplace cleaning practices, ventilation and risk assessments of staff health also play an important role in infection prevention and control and managing the safety of staff and patients. In addition, of course front line staff have now been offered the COVID vaccination.

**6.14.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Is the Minister aware that those who work without these masks and in contact with COVID-19 patients are 4 times more likely to contract COVID-19 themselves than those operating with these masks? Is that factor not a consideration for him when he considers the balance of a little more

expense and having people properly protected, those working in the non-intensive areas where they become exposed to COVID and are acquiring it?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

May I invite the Deputy to share his research with me and the infection control team? We can look into the assertion he makes and we can see whether it has been taken into account by Public Health England guidance, how Public Health England may have sponsored it, if the research he is aware of is validated. We are anxious at all times to adopt the best practices, which is why we follow the appropriate Public Health England guidance. At the present time the risk assessments have been made in conjunction with staff and those representing them and staff have appropriate P.P.E., but again I invite the Deputy, if he has research, to share that with us.

**6.14.2 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

I have sent to the Minister and others information regarding the use of ultraviolet in air-conditioning systems and ventilation systems, heating systems and so on, which can kill the COVID virus, as well as others. Can he tell Members whether any research has been conducted by his officers into this? Because it would minimise the spread of the virus into not only intensive care areas, but other areas of the hospital, and I might add also schools, which may enable things to get back together much earlier.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

The question is rather outside the scope of the initial question, which was on the wearing of masks. I have not been able to ask that of officers specifically, though ventilation is clearly something that is recommended in Public Health England guidance and it may be that there is further research and a response from Public Health England on the research the Deputy has referred to. I will seek out any response from our local officers.

**6.14.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

What has the Minister learnt from the distribution of P.P.E. during this pandemic or does he reflect the attitude of the Chief Minister, that even with hindsight he would not have done anything differently?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

There is always learning to be gained and there was difficulty in obtaining P.P.E. in the first months of the pandemic because of a worldwide shortage, so I think the lesson for us is that we must ensure that the Island is sufficiently prepared for emergencies of this nature should they occur in the future. That means not just public services, but we must try to ensure that private establishments such as care homes have a means of having an adequate supply and stock of P.P.E. We work closely with care homes, even closer since the pandemic has arisen, we combine together and ensure that P.P.E. is fully distributed as necessary. I hope that combined working will continue into the future.

**6.14.4 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Can I take from that that one of the things the Minister would have done differently is to supply P.P.E. more quickly, more effectively and on a wider scale to care workers and hospital staff and those on the front line?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I think the pandemic showed us that we need a co-ordinated Island response to emergencies of this nature in which Government and the private sector play their part, supporting each other.

**6.14.5 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:**

On the issue of P.P.E., as the Minister has outlined the new provision, will he arrange and set up a meeting with our Health and Social Services Scrutiny Panel - to meet socially distanced, of course - at the new arrangement centre up at Five Oaks, the original building, so we can see the changes and better understand what the Minister is saying in his answers?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Yes, happy to facilitate that. I think we had tried - was it before Christmas now - and it was the case that panel members and my team also were just not available because of the busyness of our schedules, but we can pick that up once again and ensure that visit takes place, socially distanced.

**6.14.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

As far as I understand, the information on the face masks is in the public domain, but I shall have a look around it and certainly pass on any information I find to the Minister.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I am grateful.