

21.01.19

9 Senator S.W. Pallett of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding mental distress as a result of Covid-19 restrictions (OQ.4/2021):

Given the increased risk of mental distress to Islanders as a result of both past and present COVID-19 restrictions, will the Minister advise the Assembly of the current waiting times for an appointment at the Listening Lounge, Jersey Talking Therapies and Adult Mental Health Services?

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

Thank you, Senator Pallett, but it is a broad question and I have got a number of figures to give him. First of all, the Listening Lounge provides 2 services, the first is 50 appointments each week that are available to everyone self-referring. The waiting time for that is set at a maximum of 48 hours. Secondly, it provides a counselling service with initial assessment to ensure that is appropriate. The current waiting time for that initial assessment is one week. Insofar as concerns Jersey Talking Therapies, where people self-refer they have an initial assessment. There are 18 people currently waiting for this assessment and the longest has waited 5 weeks. Then Jersey Talking Therapies provides 2 levels of support of low and high intensity. The low intensity pathway has 19 people waiting for support with the longest waiting 10 weeks. The higher intensity pathway has 106 people waiting with the longest waiting 13 months, unfortunately. The average waiting time for a first appointment for a routine referral to adult mental health teams is 4 weeks plus routine emergency referrals will be seen within an hour 24/7. The average wait time for a first appointment with older adult mental health is currently 10 days for routine. Urgent referrals are seen within 24 hours. The current waiting time for the first appointment with the memory assessment service is 6 months unless the patient is aged over 65. Then the wait is 5 weeks. Those are the current waiting times. Thank you.

10.9.1 Senator S.W. Pallett:

It seems to be that some of those waiting times have increased in recent times. Could the Minister give any indication as to whether the need for services mentioned has increased since the tighter restrictions were introduced more recently? Can he assure us that each service is coping with that extra demand?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I have no dates referencing the recent restrictions but it is the case that a number of people have been impacted by the pandemic since the spring and are seeking help both from our services and from the charitable sector offering these services.

10.9.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

My concern is that there may be a latent demand for these services but also from people who are not in a position to access them, and I am speaking particularly about the aged in residential homes in particular who find themselves, due to COVID, not only prisoners in their own homes but prisoners in their own rooms. Does the Minister have a plan for allowing these people who have been vaccinated twice against COVID to access visitors and finally have some human interaction for their mental health?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I am very pleased that the Deputy has raised the question of our residents in care homes and are approximately 1,000 Islanders who we said could not see visitors and could not leave the place they

live in and, yet, no one, until the Deputy asks, has yet put in a written question or an oral question about it. These are anxious people. Most of them have spent their whole lives in the Island and made the Island what it is now but who we have now almost locked up. So it might be extreme to say so but it is, I believe, a necessary and proportionate measure in the pandemic. There are implications and they are rather staring us in the face, human right implications, but there are mental health ones too. The work on how a vaccine will allow people to release the bonds that we have put on them has not yet been done. It has not yet been done in any jurisdiction and we are searching for it. We are beginning to have access for that but it is not a simple question and it is something that is under development.

10.9.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

I know it tests the limit the question but I think it is related to access to mental health. It seems to me that we would not do this for any other section of society. It would not be acceptable to effectively say that people who do not have COVID who have been vaccinated have to stay within their rooms or their houses without any visitors in perpetuity. Yet, we are doing this to one section of our most respected people in the Island who have perhaps got the least time left in our community. Will the Minister ...

The Bailiff:

I am sorry, Deputy. I am sure it is an important question but it does not only test but beats the limits of the question, I am afraid.

Deputy M. Tadier:

I have not asked the question yet, Sir.

The Bailiff:

Thanks very much.

10.9.4 Deputy K.F. Morel:

In his answer, the Minister for Health and Social Services mentioned waiting times such as 48 hours for the Listening Lounge and then longer. Over Christmas and New Year, I was unfortunately contacted by a family who had an individual suffering a mental health crisis and could not access any services. Could the Minister explain how Islanders who need help immediately are able to access crisis services and mental health too?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

My understanding is that they can ring the General Hospital's switchboard and be referred to services they require. That is manned 24/7. We are also arranging our teams of the crisis telephone response service, which presently is planned for between 10.00 p.m. to 8.00 a.m. so over the hours of darkness. Recruitment is taking place for that so that will be a bespoke service available to people with those particular concerns.

10.9.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is it the case that patients who turn up at the hospital with either mental or physical conditions are being turned away essentially because of the risk of contracting COVID?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

That is not the case. If anyone turns up and needs medical treatment, they will be attended to and I have not heard of what the Deputy suggests.

10.9.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:

You have had one now because I have had been contacted by somebody who was turned away. The ambulance just took them away.

The Bailiff:

Well, is that a supplementary question that you were asking for, Deputy Southern?

Deputy G.P. Southern:

I believe that was a supplementary, Sir.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I would say that rather than raising that in question time, it would be far more useful if the Deputy could get in touch with me immediately he hears about something like that and we will ensure that any treatment that a patient needs is given to them.

10.9.7 Senator S.W. Pallett:

Firstly, can I thank the Minister for his answers but can the Minister assure the Assembly that all those services mentioned are communicating effectively and regularly with those in need to ensure they are not becoming increasingly ill?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I think I can give that assurance. Our teams have a very good oversight of the most vulnerable in our community and, as the Senator said, we have developed a crisis and home treatment theme, which is seeking to address problems while people are still at home and before they become so acute that we need to take them in as inpatients. I also commend the excellent work that has been done by Mind Jersey, by the Recovery College and by the teams in the charitable sector. There is good partnership working with all our teams in mental health so I believe there is good co-ordination in answer to the Senator's question.