

23.09.12

12 Deputy L.J. Farnham of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding an MRI screening programme for prostate cancer (OQ.166/2023)

Given that a new study entitled "We Imagine" led by University College and published in the Medical Journal has indicated that a 10-minute M.R.I. (magnetic resonance imaging) scan can be used to screen men for prostate cancer, which is the most common cancer found in men, and that scans have proved more effective in diagnosing cancer than the blood tests, will the Minister undertake to consider introducing an M.R.I. screening programme for prostate cancer and, potentially, other types of cancer?

Deputy K. Wilson (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

As Members may well be aware, we currently use M.R.I. in a diagnostic pathway when investigating men with potential prostate cancer. There is no screening programme at the moment, the jury is still out on the benefits of that. In many cases the screening programme of this nature may identify and diagnose lots of men with very low-risk prostate issues which will never cause any physical harm. The anxiety associated with this diagnosis may be more harmful, and that statement is based on the clinical advice that I have received from clinicians. It is also a very expensive resource and used as a screening tool would have a huge cost implication for our health service, which Members will already be aware is a concern. But I think Islanders can be assured that when they are in contact with the clinician, the discussion between the patient and the clinician will determine at what point in the pathway the M.R.I. will be used as a diagnostic process.

5.12.1 Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Can I thank the Minister for her answer? I think the message is that she is reluctant, based on advice she has received locally, to introduce a screening programme for the reasons she mentioned. But it seems that the pilot study I referred to in my question was quite conclusive in its findings and demonstrated that lives were saved by more effective screening for cancers and not just for prostate cancer but for other forms of cancer in men and women. I would ask her just to clarify, is she considering a screening programme or is she not at this current moment in time?

Deputy K. Wilson:

At this moment in time there is no wide-based screening programme planned. If I could just say that the study reported in the media, which the Deputy is referring to, was a feasibility study and it was about using M.R.I. as a screening tool, compared to P.S.A. (prostate-specific antigen) blood testing. I do not particularly want to get into the clinical detail of it here but there is a reason as to why these 2 different diagnostic screening tools are used. It has already been established that M.R.I. is much better at detecting cancer. The recommendation from this study in particular was that a larger screen trial was necessary so that all conclusions about screening the entire population cannot be drawn as yet, I think, until we have got a much broader evidence base that will guide our decision-making.

5.12.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can I ask the Minister, she said that the jury is out on screening but does she agree that the jury is out on the effectiveness of P.S.A. screening in terms of blood tests? Some G.P.s (general practitioners) do say that it is not something they would do. Would she agree that this is a different form of screening that could be valuable to this Island?

Deputy K. Wilson:

Yes, I agree, it is useful and I think, as I have already restated, that we do use M.R.I. diagnostics as part of the pathway when we are investigating men with potential prostate cancer.

5.12.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Given that this was a feasibility study and we are now looking for a wider study in the U.K. and the demographic of men in Jersey, would the Minister not try to be involved as part of this further study, which will be both beneficial to men on this Island and beneficial to all members of communities across where this could be useful?

Deputy K. Wilson:

Certainly, I will make some enquiries as to whether or not in any trial work on this basis.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Sorry, Sir, I could not hear that answer at all, apologies. I do not know what happened.

The Bailiff:

I think we have time if you could simply repeat the answer so the Deputy can hear you. It is a little bit difficult because the Deputy is online, of course.

Deputy K. Wilson:

Yes, I can make some enquiries as to whether or not Jersey residents can be included in any trial work around this issue.