

2025.05.13

2.2 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier Central of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the Patient Travel and Related Costs Policy – Revised October 2020 (OQ.107/2025):

Will the Minister advise whether the current policy for travel to the U.K. for medical treatment remains the Patient Travel and Related Costs Policy – Revised October 2020, and whether it was reviewed 3 years from approval, in October 2023, as stipulated?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet of St. Saviour (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

The Deputy's assumption is quite correct. The policy currently in use is the one that was revised in 2020. The policy was not reviewed in 2023 but I am pleased to say that it is now under review, and I expect an updated policy to be in place later this year. Pending completion of that review and in light of a situation that was kindly brought to my attention by Deputy Southern, I have asked officers to make an interim change to the policies to state that we may fund escort accommodation, in addition to travel, where both the patient and patient escort are from households on income support.

2.2.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

When the Minister says the policy will be subject to review, what exactly does he mean by "review"?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

A thorough review, reviewing all elements.

2.2.2 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:

Can the Minister explain why the travel and cost policy mentioned in the question does not apply to I.V.F. (in vitro fertilisation) patients receiving publicly-funded treatment in the U.K.?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

Because the free treatment of I.V.F. came into play some time after the review in 2023. Having had that brought to my attention, I am happy to look at that as part of the review while not committing to anything at this point.

2.2.3 Deputy I. Gardiner:

Would the Minister give a bit more detail, what are the parts of the review? What are the contents of the current review?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

I am not able to do that at this stage. I have not at this stage had a close look at it. When some of the recommendations come through then I will start to take a closer look. But at this stage I have not been heavily involved in the review so far.

2.2.4 Deputy I. Gardiner:

Can the Minister commit that the decision of the States Assembly will be implemented as the Assembly decided?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

Could the Deputy be more specific about that which I am supposed to commit to, because I am a bit confused?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Yes, can you clarify what decision you referred to?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

It was a States Assembly decision to pay for the partner or accompanied person to the treatment. It was a very clear States Assembly decision then to change the policy for companion traveller.

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

I am not entirely sure precisely which section that refers to. We do have payment in the policy as it is to pay for additional travellers under certain circumstances. I was not aware that there is an Assembly decision that has not been implemented, but if that is the case then I will certainly look at it.

[10:00]

2.2.5 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

The Minister said that there will be a thorough review of the travel policy. Could he tell us what the guiding principles of that review will be? For example, what is the policy considerations that he would want to make sure are included in that?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

One of the things that we will have to take into consideration is the pressure on our budget at the moment. When we say we are reviewing it, it will not be that all elements of it will necessarily be more generous than they are at the moment. We may have to make special provisions for people on low income, but it could be that certain areas of it are tightened up simply because of the budgetary pressures that we are under at the moment.

2.2.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

Trying to look at it, I suppose, from a patient and user point of view, are there any guiding principles to say that, for example, everybody should be able to be accompanied and that the partners that travel with them should have only travel paid or that they should also have ... we should aspire to pay for their accommodation? What is the provision that the Minister would like to and thinks that is appropriate for Government to assist with?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

The aspiration has to be as broad ranging as we can possibly manage but I make no bones about it, and I have said it probably a dozen times before in the Assembly, there is a huge amount of pressure on the Health budget. Not because of inefficiency but because of the amount of treatments that come out every year that we are obliged to offer people. It is a very, very difficult decision-making process. We will do our best with it, but at this stage of the game, as I say, I cannot make any guarantees, and I certainly do not expect it to be generally more generous than it is at the moment.

2.2.7 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Minister admit that one of the problems with this system is that of payment in advance for those people who are in need of support, for example? In the past, the costs have been offset against special payments made through social security in order to cover those types of incidents?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

I will certainly concede that certainly in my 13 or 14 months in the job, but there are instances that present difficulties, and they have been pointed out to me. Some of those are when people have to go at very short notice to the U.K. That is an area that I have asked to be reviewed as well, so that we might be able to make special provision in certain urgent circumstances.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

In terms of funding ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Was that part of your last question, was it?

Deputy G.P. Southern:

I believe it is an extension of what we were discussing.

The Deputy Bailiff:

If you have had your final supplementary, you have had it.

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

I am very happy to answer that. I will just say that that is the point of the review, to look at what might be done and the way in which we would do it to make it practical and workable.