

4.9 Deputy K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the potential withdrawal by the United Kingdom from the reciprocal health agreement with the Island:

Further to news that the United Kingdom may withdraw from the reciprocal health agreement, what steps, if any, will the Minister take to protect Jersey residents who require treatment in the U.K. (United Kingdom)?

Senator B.E. Shenton (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

I am pleased to advise the Deputy that we will take every step possible to protect the Jersey resident that may be vacationing in the U.K. and require treatment. We are working very closely with our counterparts in the Isle of Man and Guernsey with regard to negotiations with the U.K. in respect of the reciprocal health agreement and I am fairly confident that it will still be in place in 2009 and perhaps even beyond. What we have to do as a department and as a body is ensure that no one is disadvantaged by the reciprocal health agreement if it does not remain in place and certainly we will have to make sure that people can travel freely without people being discriminated against because of a health condition or because of a disablement or any other factor. But negotiations are ongoing. I would just like to add that because we are negotiating with the U.K. in a sort of triangular measure - Jersey, Guernsey and Isle of Man - if you require specific information it will be better if we gave information out as a core group as opposed to one area saying one thing and another area saying another but negotiations are ongoing and my Chief Officer came back from the Isle of Man about 2 weeks ago and had some very fruitful meetings up there.

4.9.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I thank and welcome the Minister's reply. As the Minister is no doubt aware, many Jersey residents will need medical treatment in the U.K., both presently and in the future and it will not be possible for senior citizens to obtain the necessary medical insurance which would be wholly unacceptable. There is also the contrary argument that anybody coming from the U.K. or, indeed, other British Isles will need medical insurance and this could impact in this time of economic climate on Jersey tourism. Does the Minister not agree?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

I do agree. In fact only last week we held a meeting with the Chief Officer of Economic Development and the Chief Minister to talk about the implications on other areas of the Jersey industry, such as tourism and the business community and travel insurance in that area. I think it would be a great pity if we did lose the reciprocal health agreement because I think the majority of our Islanders come from the U.K. and basically treat Jersey and the U.K. as one in the same.

4.9.2 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Along the same lines, obviously the Reciprocal Health Agreement is something that was set up to provide care for people on holiday and working in Jersey because we were receiving treatment in the U.K. when we travelled. So if the U.K. does pull that, the consequences would obviously work the other way as well, as has been indicated. But I am just wondering for those people that do visit on a regular basis or have intentions of continuing to visit Jersey who have for a number years, and for businesses that might be looking, for example, at the Waterfront to employ 500 people, are there going to be at least tentative warnings at this stage for them to look into the issue of making sure that they have adequate insurance should the U.K. pull the plug on this reciprocal agreement and, if not, what would the circumstances be if somebody reported to the hospital for treatment, would Jersey continue to treat them regardless of whether or not they were insured and were not resident?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

I should point out that we have not as yet been given notice with regard to the Reciprocal Health Agreement and we would have to make sure that alternative arrangements are in place. I think it

would be a little bit premature to turn around to people now and say you have to take out insurance when it may not be the case, because ultimately the aim of the department is to have a system in place where people do not need to take out health insurance to travel to the U.K. because if you are elderly or you have a chronic condition it may prevent you from going to see your relatives in the U.K. or vice versa coming here. So as a department we are working forward to a seamless solution and we hope, as I said before, in conjunction with our colleagues in the Isle of Man and in Guernsey.

4.9.3 Deputy C.J. Scott Warren of St. Saviour:

I just wonder if the Minister would like to comment on whether he considers that this situation, which is obviously worrying ... whether he would agree that it is not really in line with other policies by the U.K. Government where they do expect that we will give a contribution to defence and obviously I know there are other areas of concern in education. I just wondered if he would like to comment.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

I would agree. I think this has wider implications. I was having another look at the T.V. (television) Licence Law, for example, whereby we are sort of bound to pay T.V. licences over here and so on. It does have other ramifications and I think that is why negotiations are ongoing and I do think if we stand firm we do have quite a good negotiating stance.

4.9.4 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

I wonder if the Minister could confirm, as Deputy Scott Warren said, that the issue is the U.K. Government's user pay policy and that essentially once the dust clears the issue is about how much more money we are prepared to pay for this service.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

I think the Deputy is totally correct. The U.K. is looking at this from a purely financial viewpoint and what we are trying to do is make them look at more on the round from a constitutional and a moral perspective as well.