

5.9 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire of St. Helier of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding cancer statistics:

Can the Minister set out the current statistics for people diagnosed with cancer in Jersey, stating whether there is a prevalence in any specific age group or for particular cancers when compared to the United Kingdom or France and advise whether Jersey residents are subject to any greater risks of developing cancer due to the geology of Jersey or being situated near to nuclear power stations in France?

Deputy A.E. Pryke of Trinity (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

This is quite a detailed question and I will try to be as succinct as possible. The statistics for incidents of new cancers in Jersey are contained within the regular reports published for both Jersey and Guernsey by the U.K. South West Cancer Intelligence Service. The latest report is April 2010 which covers a 3-year period from 2005 to 2007. The overall incidence of cancer in Jersey is approximately 10 per cent higher than the southwest of England but death rates from cancer are, however, lower in Jersey than the U.K. Our consultant haematologist has actively looked at radiation-linked cancers including childhood leukaemias over the past 18 years. He is satisfied that Jersey does not have an excess of this type of radiation-related cancer. Radon gas arising from geological faults in granite rock formations is radioactive but this type of radiation released from radon only penetrates 1 mm or less into the skin with a poor penetration in respect to the tissues of the lung. While radon gas is recognised as a potential cause of lung cancer, the view from the General Hospital is that any theoretical effect of radon gas upon lung cancer rates is comparatively overshadowed by the effect of cigarette smoking and initiating cancers. Jersey is not unique in respect of radon exposure as similar situations exist within granite-bearing areas of the U.K. including the southwest of England. I am very happy to give Deputy Le Claire the U.K. South West Cancer Intelligence Service report as well as any other Members.

Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Thank you, Minister, for the comprehensive reply and I will gratefully accept the report.

5.9.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

I wonder if the Minister could explain further why the rates in Jersey are 10 per cent more than the comparable rates in the south or southwest of England.

The Deputy of Trinity:

The increase of cancer may not mean that this particular cancer is a problem or any particular cancer is a problem in Jersey. It is likely to be because of the cancers that have been picked up by screening, testing and increased awareness. The Cancer Registry reports over the last few years have shown that in Jersey most cancers are picked up at an earlier age than the southwest, which obviously is good news. To get a better picture, these rates should be looked at alongside our death rates, and Jersey's death rate from cancer is 155 per 100,000. In England, it is 176 per 100,000.

[10:30]

5.9.2 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Just a follow-on from the 10 per cent rise or higher proportion in Jersey. Could that also be equated to prostate cancer and has the Minister considered introducing free prostate testing for all men possibly over the age of 40?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I know this is a particular concern of the Deputy, but the prostate-specific antigen sometimes gives very false negatives and the National Screening Committee have not come out with any particular firm rules about that, but the situation is always being looked at. Again, it is raising the awareness and I understand a lot of work is being done and will continue to be done.

5.9.3 The Deputy of St. John:

I wonder if the Minister would be kind enough to forward a written copy of the answer she has given to Members, given recently my panel interviewed the M.O.H (Medical Officer of Health) - and unfortunately she has been ill since - on issues to do with radon and the like. Any information that she may have gleaned since would be very useful for any report we may bring in the future. Thank you.

The Deputy of Trinity:

Yes, and I am very happy to give to you the South West England intelligence report.

5.9.4 The Deputy of St. Mary:

A couple of points I would like the Minister to clarify. The first is that these surveys done by the Intelligence Unit, do they go down as far as looking at the geographical instance within Jersey, because obviously radon varies from place to place a lot, depending on the underlying rock? The second thing is that I noticed that she said that there was a 10 per cent higher incidence in Jersey than the southwest and then she gave figures for fatalities, comparing Jersey to England. I wonder why that was so or whether that was a mistake in the translation.

The Deputy of Trinity:

Those are the figures that I have and it is important that you look at it in perspective. I am unaware of how great depth that they do go down on the levels, but if the Deputy wants to ask me a specific question and email it to me, I will look into it.

The Bailiff:

Final question then, Deputy Le Claire?

Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

No, thank you, Sir.