

2.15 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the findings of the Verita Report in relation to communication issues:

Will the Minister confirm that following the findings of the Verita Report, all doctors currently employed by her department have a good working knowledge of the English language and that there is no communication issues between any locums, for example, and other hospital staff.

The Deputy of Trinity (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

On a small number of occasions locums may arrive with variable language skills, managers and clinicians deal with these on an individual basis. I can confirm that some contracts have been terminated on the basis of language problems. Where any such issues are identified, appropriate management actions are taken to work with the individual involved to resolve these problems.

2.15.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

The reason I ask the question, I have had an email sent to me, which was originally sent on 11th February, although I only received it later. I will circulate it to Members subsequently, although I have been advised in its current form I should not do that. I will also provide a copy to the press but in an edited format, so all names are missed out. I think Members will be interested to know that this is a current issue and I will read to them partly from the email and then ask a question. The email basically says that - I will summarise - there is somebody currently employed with a few weeks left in their contract who basically cannot speak English. This is a locum and I would also point to the Verita Report which says that language difficulties were a contributory factor in the whole Dr. Moyano incident. I would ask the Minister, does she consider that there are sufficient whistle-blowing channels at the moment, if, in fact, a member of staff in the hospital feels that they have to contact me? Secondly, what steps are being taken to address this very serious issue, given that English is a very basic requirement in any functioning department and certainly at the hospital?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I can confirm that if any members of staff have had concerns they can raise them through established procedures. I can reassure Members that they do. There is a States of Jersey whistle-blowing policy which, I would say, all staff are aware of. I know the staff do raise concerns about issues like this and they are dealt with in the appropriate and proper fashion.

[11:30]

2.15.2 The Deputy of Grouville:

Does the Minister accept all 29 recommendations and their findings in the Verita Report? It is a simple question. Will her new Chief Officer implement all 29?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Yes, I do accept there are 29, and the thirtieth recommendation is for Verita to come back in 6 months. That date has been worked up and it will be towards the end of the summer. There is a management group set up all across the board looking into putting in place some of these recommendations, some of which are in place, some of them are being put in place and some of them are more long-term.

2.15.3 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister outline the evidence that is produced in order to testify as to a person's competence in the language?

The Deputy of Trinity:

There is a locum policy and that was one of the recommendations and it has been worked on there. As to an actual specific policy, I do not have that in hand but I can come back to the Deputy to be made aware of that.

2.15.4 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I am delighted the Minister accepts the findings of the Verita Report. My question is, does the Minister have sufficient funding to implement them?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Not all the recommendations involve cost. Some of the recommendations can involve a change of working practice or even putting procedures into place. The recommendations will be looked at and will be addressed and, as I said, Verita will be back at the end of the summer to look at these recommendations.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Can I just advise Members this is not a question about the Verita Report, it is a question about language.

2.15.5 Deputy A.E. Jeune of St. Brelade:

Would the Minister agree that given the concerns raised by Deputy Tadier this morning, which go back to February he tells us, would he have been better placed to have approached the Minister earlier, rather than waiting until a question today?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I absolutely agree with Deputy Jeune, and I would like to think that Deputy Tadier would speak to me about it before he goes to press, because I am aware that there have been some issues and I know that another centre has spoken to me about it. Some of these are very personal issues and I know that the people involved - the actual patient and family involved - rely enormously on confidentiality. That is one of my concerns there and I hope Deputy Tadier would speak to me first.

2.15.6 Deputy M Tadier:

I feel that was a question that should really have been addressed to me. I did point out that while the initial email had been circulated to a colleague, not to me on 11th February, I did receive it much later. I also had to weigh-up and take advice on what the best way forward was. I completely agree with the confidentiality clause there. Nonetheless, this is a very serious issue. The supplementary is relating to the recruitment of locums of which language deficiencies forms a part. The Verita Report is very critical that there was no robust policy for recruiting and that there was no written policy for the procedure of recruiting a locum. Presumably nothing has changed, so can the Minister confirm whether serious and urgent action will be taken, if it has not been already, and also whether she will be addressing the over-reliance on locums, which in itself is a problem at the General Hospital?

The Deputy of Trinity:

There are several questions in there. Locums are, in fact, a way of life, unfortunately. Not ideal, but the doctors do go away on holiday and need to be replaced and do go

off sick and need to be replaced on very short notice. I am aware that currently that the 1983 Medical Act prohibits the systematic language testing of doctors, so in some ways our hands are tied, as that comes from the G.M.C. (General Medical Council). But regarding going back to his email, he knows that other States Members know that I, and the Ministerial team, have always had an open door and I would like to think we would respond to emails. In fact I responded to an email that Deputy Tadier sent to me yesterday afternoon, I responded quite quickly. I just stress again, if he is putting sensitive information into the public media, please, please be aware of confidentiality and confidentiality of the family.