

2.1 Deputy C.J. Scott Warren of St. Saviour of the Minister for Social Security regarding people delaying visits to G.P.s following the introduction of income support

With the possibility of people delaying visits to their doctor, can the Minister provide Members with comparable data on the number of G.P. (General Practitioner) visits before and after the introduction of income support?

Senator P.F. Routier (The Minister for Social Security):

Hopefully I can reassure the Deputy that there is no reason whatsoever why people should delay visits to their doctor if they have a genuine medical need. The number of G.P. visits fluctuates from month to month, particularly over the winter period depending on the amount and type of cold and flu viruses circulating at the time. The total number of visits since the implementation of income support for the period February through to April for this year was 62,873, which is almost identical to the number of visits for the same period last year which was 62,458. These figures are well within the normal seasonal fluctuations. The department continues to work with G.P.s to ensure people receive the most appropriate support for their clinical condition.

2.1.1 Deputy C.J. Scott Warren:

Is the Minister nonetheless concerned that the new scheme which has ended free visits to doctors for those patients who are formerly H.I.E. (Health Insurance Exception) claimants, may cause people to wait until their symptoms either clear up or get worse and if it is the latter outcome, that the result could, firstly, be very serious for the person's health and could also result ultimately in much higher costs for the Social Security and Health and Social Services Departments?

Senator P.F. Routier:

In my answer I thought I gave the evidence that there has been no reduction in the amount of visits to the doctor. Certainly I reiterate the point, which I have made on several occasions, that there is no reason whatsoever that anybody should not go to the doctor and delay going to the doctor if they have a genuine medical need.

2.1.2 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:

Is the Minister satisfied that his Communications Department has satisfactorily communicated all the situations around G.P. visits - visits to home visits, multiple visits, people who require 12 visits a year or more - has been made absolutely crystal clear to recipients of income support out there so they have absolutely no need to worry?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I very much hope that is the case. Certainly the G.P.s have all been contacted and had meetings with my department officers to ensure that they are aware of the circumstances when they are talking to their own patients. The patients themselves, hopefully, can have that discussion on a one-to-one basis with their G.P. to ensure that they do have the ability to go to the doctor whenever they need to.

2.1.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister has indicated in the supplementary report given to the House about 3 weeks ago that he would be increasing the means of communication with recipients of income support to make sure that they were completely aware of what their rights were. Which areas is he thinking he needs to better communicate then?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Communication regarding income support needs to be improved, I do know that, but this particular area with regard to G.P.s, I know there has been a lot of work already undertaken because it is vitally important that it is the case. As I said in my previous answer, the G.P.s are aware that if any

patient has a concern about their health needs and the ability to visit or have a doctor visit them, they speak directly to their doctor and the doctor can resolve that for them.

2.1.4 Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Martin:

I would just like a small clarification. The Minister has answered many questions on call outs for doctors, attending doctors and people not to be worried, and in every answer he uses the phrase: “if they have a genuine medical need.” Can he explain to the House who decides whether they have a “genuine medical need”?

Senator P.F. Routier:

The G.P.