

2020.04.21

15 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the vacancy rate amongst qualified nursing staff, health assistance and other health professionals: (OQ.102/2020)

Will the Minister inform Members of the current vacancy rates among qualified nursing staff, health assistants and other health professionals, and state whether agency nurses will need to be recruited in order to ensure that safety limits are not breached, such as staff to bed ratios, and will he further state what the rate of absence currently is for hospital health staff?

The Deputy of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

Yes, I have figures. Ideally I would have thought that this comes over better in a written question but I can try and give these figures orally. Currently vacancies rates across Health and Community Services are as follows: registered nurses 6.5 per cent vacancy rate; healthcare assistants 4.6 per cent vacancy rate; allied health professionals 10.4 per cent vacancy rate. Absence rates fluctuate on a daily basis. The figure for yesterday, has an overall absence of 9.5 per cent across the Department. That is a total of 288 staff. That figure of 288 is broken down as follows: 134 unavailable due to COVID-19, 66 on sickness absence, 88 on leave. Your question also asked about staff to bed ratios, which we prefer to say staff to patient ratios, and that is something that is closely monitored on a shift by shift basis through the use of an e-roster. So outside of a pandemic situation we would normally have a skill base of 65 per cent registered nurses to 35 per cent healthcare assistants but at this time we have to recognise that we only have the registered nurses that are in Jersey. The Island's Chief Nurse has been working with others on plans for how we would manage the nursing workforce in the event of a significant peak in demand and has put in place a number of measures, for example, the return to the front line of a number of registered nurses who have come out of retirement or having left the profession. Secondly, an essential list of all nurses with critical care experience who can be called in to support the intensive care team. Thirdly, training and supporting staff who normally work in the theatre environment to become part of an extended intensive care team. Lastly, employment of third year student nurses into the workforce. Thank you, that concludes my answer.

The Bailiff:

Final supplementary then, Deputy Southern?

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Hang on, final supplementary, are you sure? I just started this question.

The Bailiff:

Yes, I know but no one else has indicated any question, I am not allowing supplementaries ...

3.15.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

All right, so can the Minister assure us that he can spread this ... nurses and other professionals, health carers, through an extra 180 beds possibly on the Island in the new Nightingale ward and still keep safety standards up to scratch and not have his entire workforce exhausted after the next couple of weeks?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Deputy, I want to pay tribute to the resilience of our staff, to their willingness to step up to a hugely challenging situation. We do care for our staff. We are very mindful of their needs, their mental

health and their levels of capacity. There is very detailed planning about how we will do that. It is not the back of an envelope job. All parts of the service have been involved and if we need to stretch we will stretch. I commend the staff for their ability to adapt to these changing circumstances and to provide readily and willingly care for Islanders.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Commending the staff is no answer to that question.

The Bailiff:

That was the final supplementary. Could I just mention someone has indicated they want a point of clarification? That is obviously a foreign concept in question time. There can be a question but there is no opportunity as there is in speeches for clarification to be given. The final question on the list is to be asked by Deputy Morel of the Chief Minister.