

3. Questions to Ministers without notice - Minister for Health and Social Services:

The Bailiff:

That concludes oral questions. We come now to questions to Ministers without notice. The first question is of the Minister for Health and Social Services.

3.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

The Minister has often stated that he wants to see money given to the Ministry flow straight through to better patient care and his Assistant has often spoken about the excessive heavy nature of senior management. Would he, therefore, tell the Assembly on what basis the recently advertised position of Deputy Director for Corporate Planning and Performance Management will have a demonstrable effect upon the care at the front line of patients and clients of the Health and Social Services Ministry?

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

The role that the Deputy talks about was just a title passed to an existing employee. It was not the employment of additional personnel. We just gave someone a bit more responsibility.

3.1.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

I wonder if I could press the issue. Would he, therefore, confirm that patients are feeling better and clients are [Laughter] succeeding better because there is a Deputy Director of Corporate Planning and Performance Management?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

I am sure they will do because now we have a Deputy Director of Corporate Planning to cover when the Director of Corporate Planning is out of the Island or on holiday.

3.2 Deputy J.A. Martin:

The Medical Officer of Health was recently reported to have said, having completed a comprehensive and up-to-date health register for Jersey's population, she was quite disappointed in the results of the attendance at screenings. My question is how many names are on this up-to-date health register?

The Bailiff:

Before you answer that question, Minister, I am afraid we have become inquorate.

Deputy J.J. Huet of St. Helier:

Can we have a roll call, do you think, sir?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

Could I ask you to keep the clock running while we are inquorate? [Laughter]

The Bailiff:

Yes, it certainly does. It operates to your advantage, Minister. Perhaps you would reply to the question now.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

We have still have a lot of work to do on the health register but I think our database is up to about 43,000 names at the moment.

3.3 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

As one of those people unfortunate enough to contract salmonella recently and knowing that other people who did so have been seriously ill, will the Minister undertake to make public the entire report that is being prepared by Public Health?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

I see no reason why the report should not be made public and I will get on to the relevant department accordingly.

3.4 Deputy A.E. Pryke of Trinity:

With M.R.S.A (Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus) and clostridium difficile having a high profile in the media recently, and dirty hospitals, could the Minister inform the House on the M.R.S.A. and clostridium difficile numbers in Jersey?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

Our record on M.R.S.A. and the other is exceedingly good and I believe one of our staff was on the television only a couple of weeks ago running through all the various numbers. I am very pleased to say that the standards at the hospital are exceedingly high and, in fact, when Senator Perchard and myself went around the wards recently they disinfected one as soon as we left.

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

Can the Minister give a time, roughly within weeks, of when the remaining 12 or so States Members who have not yet had the New Directions presentation will be receiving that?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

I must apologise to the Deputy. I had not realised that there were still States Members waiting to receive it. I will chase it up and send her an email.

3.6 The Deputy of St. Martin:

It has been recently reported or announced that a revolutionary anti-cancer vaccine will be offered to all 12 year-old girls in the Island next year. Will the Minister inform Members how much this is going to cost and from what fund will this money be raised.

Senator B.E. Shenton:

I do not have the exact figures in front of me. It is going to be from the existing health budget. What we are looking at doing is possibly extending the vaccination to 14 to 17 year-old girls in due course. The cost is quite high per vaccination, I think it is between £200 and £300. Certainly, I can circulate the cost to the Deputy in due course.

3.7 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Notwithstanding the enthusiastic and very welcome support given by the Assistant Minister to staffing the children's section of the department, before his appearance in the department he made several statements about the need to name and shame people with great vigour. Could the Minister assure us that in dealing with this whole issue, be it through the independent inquiry and be it through the way that he and his Assistant Minister are dealing with it, that there is a much more measured and considered approach being applied and that we are not going to see the hounding of people at this particular stage?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

Senator Perchard and myself spent yesterday at Social Services. We have been around most of the areas now, quite a few of the children's homes. Senator Perchard has been working tirelessly, making sure he sees everyone. What we have said all along is we will wait for the *Williamson Report* to come out and then we will sit down and we will act on that report. We are making no pre-judgments and the staff are working very well and I think morale is pretty good around Social Services at the moment.

3.8 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

The Minister may or may not be aware that there is a Commons Select Committee currently looking into late term abortions. Will the Minister ask the relevant professional within the Health Department to compile any available evidence to answer the question of whether babies at 24 weeks' gestation, who under our current legislation can be aborted, do feel pain?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

I believe that while it is possible at the present to abort at 24 weeks this is only done in exceptional circumstances. There is no move at the moment to change the existing law and I think a fairly comprehensive reply was circulated to all States Members fairly recently.

3.8.1 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

Supplementary question, sir. I do not believe a fairly comprehensive reply was circulated to Members recently. I think it just outlined the law as it currently stands and I do not believe the Minister has answered my question. I have asked the Minister will he compile all relevant evidence that there is to date to answer this question?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

At the request of the Deputy I will certainly compile a report on the evidence to date if the Deputy so wishes.

Deputy J.A. Hilton:

I am very grateful.

3.9 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Further to news from the National Health Service that it is proposed that doctors are to allow nurses to decide whether patients should be resuscitated if the patient's heart or breathing stops, can the Minister confirm that he has no intention of permitting such a practice in Jersey?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

There is certainly no intention at the moment to change the way things are at present. Obviously, we will have to have a look at the guidelines that were issued in October 2007 by the Royal College of Nursing and go through them but certainly there is no movement to change anything at the present time.

3.10 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Can the Minister confirm that the oft-stated promise incorporated into this Assembly's wishes at the previous Strategic Plan debate of an independent complaints body for health is on track and that such a body or procedure will be introduced on 1st January 2008?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

It is on track after many false starts. We are now looking at a collaboration with Guernsey whereby Guernsey will provide the independent complaints personnel. We are looking at quite a few other alliances with Guernsey because it makes a lot of sense for us to work a lot more closely with our sister Island.

3.11 The Deputy of Trinity:

On the issue of the resuscitation, could the Minister inform the reasons why he is not looking into this area, that nurses will be able to look at decisions, please?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

I apologise to the Deputy. I did not wish to mislead her. What I said is we are not looking at changing anything at the present time. I did not say we were not looking into it. There is a slight difference there. I have been given a fairly comprehensive note to accompany me today in case

this question came up. To be perfectly honest with you I do not understand it and it is a very, very complicated issue. It is obviously very important. We will see what the U.K. are doing but it is not something you make a snap decision on and we certainly will not follow just for the sake of following.

3.11.1 The Deputy of Trinity:

A supplemental, sir. In that case, you are looking at what the U.K. do, but can I also stress that you look at what the local branch of the R.C.N. (Royal College of Nursing) feels about it and the local nurses here, please?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

Certainly, I would hope within any organisation you always refer to the people on the ground and full consultation will take place.

3.12 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Could I ask the Minister is the Williamson review is still on track and could he remind Members when the report will be published?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

We are looking at publication around February or March. It is on track but there still is an awful lot of work to be done. I met with Mr. Williamson last week. Senator Perchard has also met him on frequent occasions. It seems to be proceeding very well. I have every confidence in Mr. Williamson. I think he will produce a very fair and independent report and then it will be up to myself and Senator Perchard to act on the report when it comes out.

3.13 The Deputy of Trinity:

Just to keep the subject of Overdale with us, could he say how many patients are currently either in Leoville or McKinstry ward?

Senator B.E. Shenton:

Overdale is of great concern to myself and to Senator Perchard. It is something that we want to get right and it is an area that we want to keep within the Health Department. I could not give you the exact numbers at McKinstry but it is very low now. The Deputy is shaking her head but I was under the impression it was around about a dozen people. I can confirm the numbers. As the Deputy is aware, I have asked her and a number of other Members to have a meeting up at Overdale later in the month - the old scrutiny sub-panel that looked at Overdale - because I want to get some feedback on what they found out as a sub-panel and what their feelings are.