

2024.12.10

3.14 Deputy T.A. Coles of St. Helier South of the Minister for the Environment regarding independent regulation of further services (OQ.239/2024):

Will the Minister advise what plans, if any, he has to introduce independent regulation of further services, once the regulation for the hospital and ambulance services has been implemented?

Deputy S.G. Luce of Grouville and St. Martin (The Minister for the Environment):

As the Deputy notes in his question, my primary focus in this area since taking office has been on ensuring that effective legislation is introduced to the Assembly to regulate hospital and ambulance services as soon as possible. I am pleased to report that that work is on course and I would hope to lodge it in the very near future. There are a wide range of health and social care services that are still not regulated in Jersey. They include G.P.s, dentists, clinics, cosmetic procedures and adult social care. However, my next priority is to work with the Minister for Health and Social Services and the Care Commission to develop proposals for regulating cannabis prescribing, because I am concerned about the current practice in this area.

3.14.1 Deputy T.A. Coles:

I thank the Minister. We had received a briefing on the ambulance and hospital regulation and I think it is work that is very well done and is going to be very important. Has the Minister given any consideration to private sector mental health support, i.e. things like counselling? With the rise in mental health issues within the Island, it is imperative that we ensure that people who are offering services are qualified for what they advertise.

Deputy S.G. Luce:

I do not currently have plans to regulate private counselling services. Mental health services are provided by the Department of Health and Community Services and those are included in my proposals for hospital regulation. Outpatients' children's mental health services are already regulated as they are provided by a registered healthcare professional. But I take the Deputy's question on board, there are a large number of other services we could look at and I just need to be mindful every time that I do not overload both inspectors and the services which are being inspected.

3.14.2 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:

I am grateful to the Minister that he stated that we have G.P., dental, cosmetics and other services, private services, that are not regulated. Would the Minister indicate from these areas which ones he has more concerns than others and which one could be prioritised?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

As I said, the prioritisation after the hospital and ambulance will be on the cannabis clinics because the report, the review, which was commissioned by the previous Government and published in March, certainly highlighted to me that there are some issues with certain cannabis users getting prescriptions from multiple different outlets. That is a great concern because they may well be using more of this drug than the doctors expect them to be doing. But there are a number of other areas, as the Deputy has asked the question, that we could look at. My main priorities at the moment are to conclude the hospital and the ambulance and then look at cannabis prescribing before deciding where to go next.

3.14.3 Deputy I. Gardiner:

I am grateful for the answer. I think that between the areas that I have mentioned in my previous questions ... I know that we have an ongoing connection with the G.P. From previous experience personally as a Deputy, I have received more concerns and complaints around the dentist regulations, services and the provision. Is it anything the Minister would consider at the meantime because the dentist's practices are required to get close attention?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

Yes, I will consider that and I have considered it already. G.P.s, as many will know, are regulated by the G.M.C. (General Medical Council) in the U.K.. so they are registered. That is helpful but we need to always bear in mind of course that if we do not have our own regulation here it may be that those institutions in the United Kingdom may look to us and say: "Oh well, it is fine registering these doctors but they are not working in an environment which is regulated." I think that is a very important thing to bear in mind because the relationship between doctors and their registered G.M.C. and our relationship with the U.K. is really important and we would not at any point wish to put that in jeopardy. But I take the Deputy's views on board about dentists as well.

3.14.4 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:

I am grateful to the Minister for clarifying that he will be bringing this forward in the new year. Is he able to provide any indication as to the further timetable that he is following to bring the inspection of the hospital and ambulance services into place? In other words, beyond lodging hopefully early in the new year, can he give any clarity about what the timetable is beyond that?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

I cannot give exact clarity, but I know the drafting is all completed. We are just going through the final meetings to make sure we are all happy with it. I intended, I certainly still hope, that I may be able to lodge that before Christmas, which will mean a debate early in the new year. Following that, I have certainly already held meetings with the Commission about how we start the regulation of the hospital and ambulance service and that work is in train, although I can certainly provide the Deputy with the detail of the timetable. But things will be happening next year for certain.

3.14.5 Deputy J. Renouf:

Is the Minister aware of anything that might blow him off course on this or is he confident that he can get this through in the timetable he is hoping to pursue?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

Not specifically, although of course there will always be challenges to change and it may well be that there are some concerns about the cost of regulation, but this has already been agreed and the money needed to start the regulation of the hospital and ambulance services has been approved by the Assembly moving forward. There will always be some that will be concerned about the cost implications of the regulation itself. I am absolutely committed to bringing this matter forward. Any money that is spent upfront is money that is well spent and money that can save us a great deal in the future.

3.14.6 Deputy T.A. Coles:

Does the Minister consider good regulation a pathway to excellence or just a hindrance to business?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

I would certainly look upon it as a direction of travel heading towards excellence. There may well be work that needs to be done in certain parts of the hospital and ambulance service yet to be identified.

I am also certain we will find that certain parts of it are in excellent order and operating very, very well, but that work is to be done. I certainly do not regard it as a hindrance, and I think it is a very positive thing to do that can only benefit the public of the Island for an even better health service than the one we currently have.