

23.02.07

1 Deputy L.J. Farnham of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding skilled overseas medical staff (OQ.13/2023)

In the absence of a coherent plan for the new hospital, will the Minister advise what is being done to make Jersey attractive to skilled overseas medical staff and care workers in this highly competitive global recruitment market?

Deputy K. Wilson of St. Clement (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

The Health and Community Services Department are undertaking various initiatives to attract skilled overseas medical staff and care workers. These include Career First, advertising through professional publications, using specialist recruitment agencies, and if Members would like some more information on this I have listed with the Health and Social Security Panel, through the scrutiny process, and with Deputy Southern through the questions process on various occasions on this topic specifically, all of which can be found on the States Assembly website. I would also like to note that this is a highly competitive global market for healthcare staff, which does not just affect Jersey so we do have to make additional efforts. One of the key issues bringing over medical and care staff is the cost of living and housing, and my colleagues and I are working together to address these issues.

4.1.1 Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Can I think the Minister for her answer? Of course she touched on the most challenging point for bringing staff to Jersey and that is cost of living here. As part of any staff retention programme is the Minister looking at how she might or the department might provide more realistically affordable accommodation for medical staff?

Deputy K. Wilson:

As we all know, the issues with housing in the Island have been well-discussed here and how it is affecting all industries and departments, not just healthcare. Myself and the Council of Ministers are looking at a whole range of initiatives to address this. The Chief Minister is leading a Population and Skills Ministerial Group looking at options for further key worker accommodation. The Minister for the Environment, through the bridging Island Plan, is enabling the delivery of 25 key worker units a year. The Minister for Housing and Communities is supporting H.C.S. (Health and Community Services) and other departments with key worker accommodation through our arrangement with Andium Homes and, in relation to that, a further 20 key workers at Le Marais are accommodated. There may well be further key worker accommodation at Hue Court. Andium currently house 138 key workers and the Minister for Home Affairs is also keeping her profile or her eye on the workforce permits policy under review so that we can attract people if they are applying for jobs on an individual basis.

4.1.2 Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier Central:

Can the Minister estimate the extra cost, perhaps as a percentage, of using agencies in the U.K. (United Kingdom) seeing as we seem to be heading down that track, not just in health but in other areas of our need?

[9:45]

Deputy K. Wilson:

I have prepared a written statement on this particular issue around use of locum costs and I would be prepared to provide some more detailed information for Assembly Members. But we all

acknowledge that locum cover is hugely expensive so we must double our efforts to try and offer contracts that are meaningful for people. But, as I have said, it is not just about offering the job. It is the wider conditions that support people's decision to come and live and work here.

4.1.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

I just asked for that percentage estimate of how much extra it costs to hire somebody from a U.K. agency, who obviously take their cut, as it is to train and employ locally.

Deputy K. Wilson:

I do not have those figures with me but I would be happy to provide those to the Deputy. But it is a particular increase on the existing salary that we provide as part of a routine contract. We have also done some work on the locum agency that has been used to try and get some more value for money out of whatever locum agency contract we have. I will be able to provide more detail on that in due course.

4.1.4 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier Central:

Given the ongoing debate around the size of the hospital does the Minister have an estimate for the numbers of staff she needs to deliver services required not only in the hospital but in the community?

Deputy K. Wilson:

We are going through a programme of transformation in Health and Community Services. What that will require is to look at our workforce strategy and our workforce plan and remodel that in relation to some of the ways in which we want to provide care going forward. At the moment we are basing our assumptions on the current workforce profile but the skill mix of that will change over time and that may mean for some professional groups there will be a change in the numbers and the percentages of the workforce that we will require around those particular professional groups.

4.1.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Has the Minister been engaged with the Minister for Infrastructure to produce a final figure for the size of staffing that she requires to deliver the service that she thinks this Island needs?

Deputy K. Wilson:

As you know, there is political oversight of the development of the hospital from both in estates and a workforce and service perspective. Clearly, the Minister for Infrastructure and I will be working very closely to align these particular issues going forward. We must start the work on the design of the service model of the workforce and then design the estate around that. But what I can assure the Deputy is that we are working together on this.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can I ask a supplementary there?

The Bailiff:

You have just asked a supplementary, Deputy Southern.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

The answer was not clear.

The Bailiff:

Sorry, I think if you can take it outside of the normal asking, you can do that.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

I accept your ruling, Sir.

4.1.6 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

In her answer to the original question she referred to working with other Ministers to provide affordable housing for healthcare staff. How confident is the Minister that the housing being provided is the type and quality that will attract and retain staff?

Deputy K. Wilson:

Yes, this has been a discussion between myself and the Minister for Housing and Communities as to how we can vary the offer to the various professional groups that are interested. I can assure the Deputy that we are working to address not only the issue of supporting people to live in one-bedroom accommodation but taking a much broader account of what the needs of families might be as well. I think we have also got a problem with the timing and the way in which these things come onstream. So there is some delay to addressing all of the need but we are actively working on it.

4.1.7 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

We all know that we are working within a competitive global market so, with regard to accommodation and the cost of living, how does the income that potential healthcare workers compare with other jurisdictions and has any work been done to ensure that Jersey is in fact an affordable place for healthcare workers to live?

Deputy K. Wilson:

Clearly this will be part of the review of the Workforce Skills Commission Group, and this is not entirely within the remit of the Health Department. But what I can say in response to the Deputy's question is that when you take a first glance of the salary scales and compare those perhaps to our neighbour in the U.K., we do offer a very competitive salary here. I think, as I have explained before, it is the wider cost of living and cost of housing here that is prohibitive.

4.1.8 Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Just turning a bit more focus on care workers. We know there is a shortage of care workers in the public and private sectors, and I understand that has resulted in beds being utilised in the hospital and causing ongoing problems. Will the Minister commit to putting more resources into helping to alleviate that problem across the Island?

Deputy K. Wilson:

Yes, I am very supportive of any initiatives or any design of health services to move people out of hospital nearer their home or into the community close to their home. We have a major challenge to redesign our health system and with that goes the redesign of our workforce. Ultimately that will mean that we will have to invest in the workforce that can provide care in an alternative setting other than a hospital. Yes, as part of our workforce review, I can give that commitment that we will look to make sure that we will provide staff where they are needed.