

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
BY THE DEPUTY OF ST. JOHN
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON MONDAY 13th JULY 2009**

Question

Given that Swine flu has arrived on Island, can members be advise what contingency plans, if any, are in place to ensure that the Hospital continues to be fully staffed should the following situations arise–

- (a) if medical staff (doctors and nurses) fall ill with Swine flu
- (b) if members of staff's families are taken ill
- (c) if members of staff have to stay at home to look after their families because schools are shut?

Answer

The General Hospital has been developing contingency plans to deal with Swine flu since the World Health Organisation (WHO) identified this viral strain in Mexico in April of this year. The contingency plans are based upon the existing Major Incident Plan, the purpose of which is to deal with an extraordinary incident such as a major disaster (For example, a chemical or biological terrorist attack, a major multi-casualty collision, a multiple life threatening incident at the airport). (All general hospitals in the British Isles have such plans and are required to update them from time to time to reflect new lessons learnt as incidents occur across the world). The 'contingency plans' which the Deputy refers to is known within my Department as 'the Swine flu operational plan' – and a clinical and managerial group chaired by Dr Ivan Muscat, Consultant Microbiologist, has been responsible for developing it.

The Deputy asks what plans exist to ensure the hospital 'continues to be fully staffed'. It is not a realistic planning assumption to believe that in some way hospital staff will be immune from the onset of infection across the Island. An estimate has been made about the number of staff who will be absent from work during the onset of the predicted pattern of infection. The planning assumption is that an adult will be on sick leave for up to seven days.

It is important to ensure that the vast majority of Islanders who become infected are treated and cared for in their own homes or in the community. This will enable the General Hospital to deal with its 'normal' emergency care service and also manage those complex cases whose admissions are precipitated by Swine flu. A significant effort is being placed in creating, resourcing and funding the 'community response'. The reason for this is that whilst Swine flu is demonstrably more transmittable than seasonal flu, it is – with some exceptions – a milder form of flu which can be managed by patients in the community with support.

Whilst the 'community response' is the best means of protecting the General Hospital's ability to perform its emergency function, a further action will be deployed if necessary which is to cancel all elective surgery (i.e. planned, routine surgery) and to reallocate the staffing to the hospital's general and emergency medical services.

This is the best means of managing the predicted absentee rate of doctors and nurses, if either they become ill themselves or are required to remain at home as parents or as carers.

It is clearly a concern to all parents of school aged children if a school – or schools – have to be closed. The General Hospital caring staff, who are also parents, will wish to act as all other parents would in such circumstances. It must be said that Jersey has been successful to date in containing outbreaks in schools. This success is in no small measure due to the excellent working relationship that has been created between my Department and the Education, Sport and Culture Department in tackling this matter together with great professionalism and resolve. A senior member of the Education, Sport and Culture Department sits as a full member of the Medical Officer of Health's Incident Team meetings which take place every other working day. As yet, I cannot speak definitively upon the matter of school closures on health grounds and this matter is clearly

of as much political interest to the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture as it is to me. Our two Departments are considering how best we deal with the potential for schools to be the generating source of infection, but it is too early for us to make any public statement on this matter.

Finally, Islanders should take comfort from the work that is underway, both within my Department and across the States to mitigate the impact of Swine flu. The prediction is that my Department will come under heavy and sustained pressure for a significant period of time. This will require additional resources – and it will require an extraordinary effort from all of my staff, all relevant staff in other States Departments, the undoubted contributions of the Parishes and the charitable sector. I am sure that this effort will be there for us all to see when it is needed.