

2016.04.26

3.12 Deputy K.C. Lewis of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding front line medical staff suffering from severe stress:

How many front line medical staff have reported suffering from or have been signed off with severe stress? How many have cited staff shortages as a stress factor and what action, if any, is the Minister taking to address this?

Senator A.K.F. Green (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

Five medical staff have been absent on occasions for reasons associated with stress in the last 12 months. This represents about 3 per cent of the medical workforce. To go into detail when the number is so small could lead to the identification or at least speculation as to who the individuals are. However, when perceived staff shortages are suggested as one of the factors contributing to the employee's stress the following actions would include; reviewing the volume of work in the relevant area, reviewing the number, type of staff and skills of staff working in that area, reviewing the practices and systems, processes and productivity of the area, and can include referring the individual to occupational health and psychological stress support services if it is appropriate and can include phased and supported return to work if appropriate.

3.12.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I believe the Minister mentioned "perceived" staff shortages. Surely if people leave that puts more stress on the people left behind. Could the Minister update the Assembly on what recruitment has been taking place recently and whether accommodation is provided?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

Accommodation is provided for some medical staff and some temporarily. Some at Westaway Court, depending on the seniority of the post. So accommodation can be provided, is probably the best answer I can give. As I said before, when I answered the question to Deputy Rondel, talking about consultants - although I do not think the Deputy is particularly talking about consultants - it is a dynamic thing. We are always looking at how we can improve our service. What different skills we need and then seeking to change posts around. For example, one third-level grade medical post was recently converted to provide a third and we are advertising now a third consultant in oncology.

[11:00]

3.12.2 Senator Z.A. Cameron:

Has the Minister considered conducting anonymous independently run exit interviews with staff who leave his department? I have evidence myself, since becoming a politician and before that time, of stress being a significant problem for staff working there and I know that plenty of individuals have also tried to inform him by email. Exit interviews could allow those staff to inform him honestly the reason for leaving Jersey in a way that would not impair their ability to get references required for ongoing employment. Would he not agree?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

I will agree that stress can be a factor for all of us and it depends on what is going on in your work life, your home life and everything else. So I agree that stress is a factor that we need to acknowledge and we need to work with. I would not agree that I am not approachable for people who wish to speak to me. We carry out anonymous surveys as part of our regular work with staff and there are exit interviews. I think I answered the question.

3.12.3 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I think Senator Cameron has asked most of my question. I have been approached by several people who think stress is really getting to them and the hours they have to work are getting a little bit ridiculous in the fact that they see their child maybe an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening if they are lucky. Is the Minister aware that stress is one of the world's worst killers?

Senator A.K.F. Green:

Yes, and I know that stress is difficult for people to handle and stress at different levels, some people cope with and others do not. If the Deputy has a particular case, if he is very concerned about a person, the best thing he can do to help that person is to come and talk.