

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES  
BY DEPUTY S.Y. MÉZEC OF ST. HELIER  
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON MONDAY 30TH JANUARY 2017**

**Question**

Given that, in recent weeks, the States has had to put out messages asking the public to attend their General Practitioner (G.P.) if their ailment was not an emergency, rather than Accident and Emergency (A&E), because of the pressure placed on that service, what measures, if any, have been taken to alleviate the burden on A&E services; and what consideration, if any, has been given to improving access to G.P.s for those people who currently struggle to afford it?

**Answer**

Sending an Island-wide message to the general public requesting that they access their GP for medical support and input where appropriate is not a decision that is taken lightly by the Health and Social Services Department. However, at times of significant pressure, which was the case recently following increased volumes of seasonal illnesses and respiratory infections, it is deemed an appropriate, acceptable and sensible message to communicate. It is effective as, following any such request, the number of patients who present to the department always reduces in the short term, enabling the Emergency Department to meet patient demand.

Within the Emergency Department – which should only be used for emergencies – the number of patients and capacity to accommodate them is continuously assessed. This is monitored alongside the hospital bed capacity, ensuring sufficient in-patient beds are available for those patients who require admission for continuing treatment and acute care.

Where appropriate, Islanders should consider seeing their GP in the first instance – the Emergency Department displays posters in the reception area that promote the use of the GP out of hours service as an alternative to waiting in the department when their own GP surgery is closed. The Department is keen to review alternative models of care provision in the future or to be part of a media campaign that encourages the public to think about where they are best seen for non-emergency ailments. The staff, where appropriate, do advise patients to seek GP assistance, but this is not always accepted by patients and the staff can be victims of verbal abuse as a consequence.

Our Consultant Microbiologist continually monitors infection patterns, not only within the hospital but across our community to ensure where possible we prevent illness by the spread of infection and then handle any patients as efficiently as possible when they present to hospital. This can be helped by optimising the management of patients with respiratory and heart disease with the aim of reducing their risk of infection and thus prevent hospital admission. Greater uptake of the flu vaccine by children and by staff in care homes would assist with this.

Work is underway on supporting GP costs. Health and Social Services and Social Security have jointly commissioned Deloitte to undertake a review, which includes consideration of access for people with a low income to GPs. The scope of the review was included in the answer to Deputy Southern's written question (10) to the Minister for Social Security tabled on 17 January 2017.