

2019.10.22

**17 The Connétable of St. Martin of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the prospect of reintroducing a hyperbaric chamber in Jersey: (OQ.253/2019)**

Will the Minister advise whether there are any plans to reintroduce funding for a hyperbaric chamber in Jersey, following the closure of Jersey's previous chamber in June 2018 after funding was withdrawn?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):**

I can advise the Connétable and Members that there are no current plans to reintroduce funding for a hyperbaric chamber in Jersey.

**3.17.1 The Connétable of St. Martin:**

Could the Minister then, please, reassure the Assembly that a lack of a hyperbaric service is not putting lives at risk?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I am assured that is the case. Services are now provided in Guernsey and there is a protocol agreed between Jersey and Guernsey authorities for the provision of this care.

**3.17.2 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

Just following on from the Minister's answer, any person who is suffering from the bends, or whatever, in Jersey to get treatment has to be taken to Guernsey and, as time is important, if they are being flown there, there are obviously differences in pressure as the aircraft takes off, flies across to the island and so on. Is he absolutely certain that there is no danger to people in those circumstances by not having a chamber in the Island?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

All these things will have been very carefully measured. There are different windows of time, I am informed, of up to several hours, depending on the severity of the decompression sickness, but this has been worked out with clinicians in both islands and I am advised that the arrangements we have are working well and have worked well since this protocol was agreed with Guernsey.

**3.17.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

Does that mean when someone dies he will then review the system to see if it is working?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

No, it does not mean that.

**3.17.4 Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

Yes, apart from the fact that the plane will have to fly at virtually no height to get across to Guernsey. Does the Minister not realise that the existence of a hyperbaric chamber is a vital part of diving tourism as well as for local sportsmen and women and that the cost of it will pay itself back pretty quickly? Has he really looked at it? Has he looked at it in conjunction with the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I have not looked at it. I have not really looked at it. There is a protocol worked out with Guernsey, that was agreed in the last administration. I commend the Connétable of St. Martin, because she asks me some very interesting questions and this is the first question that has been raised of me about hyperbaric facilities. The Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture has not raised this with me. If the Senator wished to put a case to me, I would be very willing to meet her and the matter can be reviewed once again.

**3.17.5 Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

Would the Minister like to investigate this and report back to this Assembly?

**The Bailiff:**

I just need to check that we are quorate. I am not sure we are quorate. We are now quorate. **[Interruption] [Laughter]** I think you now make 26, so if you need to pop out, there we are. Thank you very much. I will just double check that. Yes, very well.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I am not going to give the commitment to officer time that the Senator asks. I am not going to do that off the cuff here, because I am advised by clinicians who care for these patients that the present arrangements work well. Now, if anyone has evidence that they do not and we need to change arrangements, then I will, of course, listen and we can investigate any new circumstances that may have arisen.

**3.17.6 Deputy K.F. Morel:**

As a scuba diver myself, it has always concerned me that the hyperbaric chamber was removed from the Island. I have to say, yes, please do not fly anyone suffering from the bends to Guernsey, because that will kill them; quite simply. Could the Minister please advise the Assembly how much removal of the hyperbaric chamber funding has saved the Government, particularly in light of the fact that it was staffed by volunteers? So, how much has this funding saved for the Island?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

First of all, I do not wish to alarm Islanders. The Deputy has said that flying anyone to Guernsey will kill them. That is not the case. The people, who have needed this treatment, have been flown to Guernsey and have received that treatment there and I do not wish any Member, or members of the public, to be alarmed by that statement. It is the case that when a transfer is made to Guernsey, the aircraft is flown at a very low level, so that there is no pressure, or change in pressure and that is permitted presumably by the airport authorities. That is part of the protocol that is well known and agreed. As to the question of costs, or savings, that was not the question that was asked of me and I do not have that detailed information. I am not immediately sure whether it can be produced in the way the Deputy asked, because this provision was essentially run through a local voluntary group and the Health and Community Services Department made a grant to it. I suppose we could advise the Deputy - sorry, I am thinking this through, because it was not on the question - how much the grant previously was and I will endeavour to circulate that to Members.

**3.17.7 Deputy M. Tadier:**

I am sure the Guernsey Tourist Board is relieved that the headline that flying into Guernsey will kill you is no longer a threat. On the more serious issue, is the Minister also aware that hyperbaric treatment is also used therapeutically for non-divers; for example, people who suffer from multiple sclerosis use it to help with their condition? Does he also agree that they could be affected by this,

or similarly, they could be brought in to use this and the value of this service could be extended if the grant were maintained at its current level, or enhanced?

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Yes, I am aware of those therapies being given. This is not something that ever was funded by my Department, because I think it is one of those therapies which is clinically not proven. It seems to benefit some from the accounts those persons give, but equally it does not seem to help other patients. I am not sure whether those therapies are different from hyperbaric provision for divers. I think they may still continue in the Island at some location, because it is a different service, but it is nothing that my Department have previously funded. The funding was solely for the assistance and treatment of divers.

**3.17.8 The Connétable of St. Martin:**

I am pleased to say most of my supplementary questions have been answered. It just surprises me that we do not have a hyperbaric chamber over here, considering that we are surrounded by water and so many people do dive and it is used for other conditions. It also really worries me that what happens if we have very inclement weather, or thick fog? That really is putting somebody's life at risk and I do not think the cost is that huge to maintain it. Anyway, thank you very much.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I think this Assembly must ask itself whether the Island must provide everything. If there is a means of working with Guernsey to provide a safe, effective, clinical treatment, why would we not do so? We are seeking in all aspects of healthcare and, indeed, throughout the Government to co-ordinate our work with Guernsey and that will mean some services being delivered here safely and not in Guernsey. So, equally, are the Guernsey States concerned that they might not have facilities. Is it not just small minded to say we have to have a facility in each island, rather than being able to pool our resources and work together where it is safe to do so? It is the case that the clinicians involved in this area of treatment can give that assurance that present arrangements are safe and are working effectively.