

2.5 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding investigations or treatments undertaken in Guernsey and associated travel costs:

Will the Minister inform Members what investigations or treatments, if any, can no longer be performed on Island but now take place in Guernsey and is the Minister confident that the measures that are in place to ensure that patients who need such off-Island treatment can meet the travel costs involved?

The Deputy of Trinity (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

Jersey patients are referred to Guernsey for some types of specialist radioisotope and bone scans. These have always historically been undertaken in Guernsey as opposed to Jersey. The only procedures that were routinely undertaken in Jersey, which have now been transferred to the U.K. as opposed to Guernsey, are some types of complex spinal procedures. Increasing specialisation in this field of spinal surgery requires use of specialist centres. Health and Social Services is acutely aware that the requirement to travel off Island has an impact on patients. We have in place a travel policy that sets out the circumstances in which we will pay for patient travel. We are reviewing that policy in order to ensure that it is affordable, equitable and that it recognises the particular pressures on people who need to make multiple off-Island trips.

2.5.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is it the case that until recently, taxis were allowed as an expense to get to and from the airport and to the hospital but that now the policy is that a bus will be taken, whatever the circumstances, including sometimes wheelchair users must take the bus?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I do not think that is a change in policy. We do not pay for people to travel for hospital ordinary outpatient departments in a taxi and I cannot understand why we would pay for them to travel to an airport but in some cases, depending on the person's mobility and the timings of flights, we will make an exception to that rule.

2.5.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is the Minister confident that she has a fund which is sufficient to meet the costs of travel in such circumstances? Is she prepared to advance people the cost of travel because in some cases, those on income support in particular, people simply do not have the amount of money they require to initially lay out that transport cost and then claim it back some 20 days later?

The Deputy of Trinity:

These are very particular cases and we would assess each case on a case by case basis.

2.5.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

But will the Minister answer the question? Is her fund sufficient to cover the costs required and will she advance monies for those who cannot afford to lay out that money?

The Deputy of Trinity:

As I said about advancing money, we will do it on a case by case basis. Regarding if we have got enough money, that is a very open-ended question and I would have to say that we live in this financial world and we have got a new way forward for Health and Social Services, which hopefully this Assembly will approve, with more funding for Health and Social Services.

2.5.4 Deputy J.A. Hilton of St. Helier:

The Minister spoke about her department reviewing the policy around the cost of travel. Can the Minister tell us when she expects to make a decision based on the findings of that review?

The Deputy of Trinity:

We are in the process of working it up and I hope to have that policy in place hopefully before the end of this year.

2.5.5 The Connétable of St. John:

Could the Minister tell us, of the many consultants that work in the hospital, who picks up the taxi bill to and from the airport when they come over on a regular basis? Is it the consultants themselves or is it the hospital?

The Deputy of Trinity:

All the consultants have a budget and if they need to refer a patient to Southampton or any other hospital, some of it does come out of the consultants' general budgets.

2.5.6 The Connétable of St. John:

That was not the question. The question was whether or not the consultants themselves have their fares from the airport to the hospital paid for by the hospital?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Sorry, I misunderstood the question. If it is a visiting consultant, I would expect that their fares are paid for by the hospital but I do not know definitely and I can come back to the Constable with that information.

2.5.7 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

The Minister said that she would make a decision on the findings of the review this side of Christmas. I would like to ask the Minister whether she has made any provision in the Medium-Term Financial Plan to increase the funding available to those families who require it?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I think in the Medium-Term Financial Plan, there is a 2 per cent increase for general Health and Social Services pressures. A lot of pressures go on, as we know, with the cost of drugs but that particular question I cannot answer at this moment in time.

2.5.8 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

Yes I understand there is 2 per cent increase for business as usual so is the Minister confirming that there is no more than 2 per cent put aside?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I know there is 2 per cent for business as usual but whether some of that will go towards travel I think it all depends what the travel policy will say when it comes out hopefully by the end of this year.

2.5.9 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Notwithstanding the Minister's review, is the Minister aware that recently a number of patients have had to cancel their appointments in London or in Guernsey and that with the increased reliance on Guernsey or other places, the demand made for travel costs to and from the Island are going to increase? Is she aware that recently appointments have had to be cancelled because of cost?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I am aware that some appointments have been cancelled and I think some appointments are cancelled for a variety of reasons. We are aware of this and we want to make sure that especially those who go off Island fairly regularly that there is a policy in place that can encompass that.

2.5.10 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will she ensure in the near future that members of the Jersey public who have to have treatment abroad will have their travel costs met in a prompt and adequate way?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I like to hope that all our costs are met in a prompt and efficient way but at the moment it is going by policy and if they fit within the criteria of the policy, then they will be met as soon as possible.