

## **2.8 Deputy J.A. Martin of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding how many children in Jersey were estimated by his Department to be obese or receiving treatment for eating disorders:**

Would the Minister inform the Assembly how many children in Jersey are estimated by his department to be obese and how many are receiving treatment for eating disorders?

### **Senator B.E. Shenton (The Minister for Health and Social Services):**

Well, this is certainly a subject that has been in the news of late and it is a very important subject with regard to the future costs to the Health Service. How many children are obese in Jersey? The Health Department is currently endeavouring to build-up its database so that we can anticipate spends in health quicker than we can at the moment. We do not have the data for all Jersey children. However, we do have figures for a number of different age groups. For example, 5 year-olds, 144 children are obese, which represents 12 per cent of the population at that age group and 266 overweight, which represents 28 per cent; 14 year-olds, 41 obese, which represents 4 per cent and 193 overweight, which represents 19 per cent. How many children are being treated for eating disorders? Approximately 10 children are currently being treated by the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services this year for eating disorders. Eight children presented with anorexic symptoms while a further 2 had other eating disorders. Approximately 47 children were treated for obesity in the previous year. The treatment rates, according to dieticians, are rising annually.

### **2.8.1 Deputy J.A. Martin:**

Yes, I asked this question because of the reports in ages 14 to 15. I do understand there is a problem with obesity but I would ask the Minister to make sure that his department is not taking the eye off the ball of all eating disorders because they say, in the age group he has just commented on here, ages 14 to 15, obesity 4 per cent, overweight 15 per cent, 81 per cent normal. But the figures show, Sir, that between the ages of 14 and 15, we have 25 per cent of children who weigh between 4 and 7 stone. Now, obviously they may not all have eating disorders but what I am trying to ensure from the Minister, Sir, is that there is a problem at both ends and there is pressure on all our children, and especially teenagers, and I would say girls in particular that what they eat and do not to eat is very, very peer-pressured. So I seek assurance from the Minister that he would keep this in sight when his department keeps on about obesity which even leads to other Ministers saying that primary school children should not have a quart of milk, Sir, because that will lead to obesity. There are very worrying statements and there are very serious issues on both ends of our children's eating problems.

### **Senator B.E. Shenton:**

I would agree with everything the Deputy has said. Eating disorders work both ways, obesity and under-eating. As a father of 2 teenage daughters, I am well aware of the different peer pressures and media pressures that young people are under these days and certainly with the examination pressures and the other pressures of life, it can have a very large impact on life, not just for them as teenagers but this can be carried on through the rest of their life. It is something that the Health Department, as I say, is very, very aware of and we will be bringing out new strategies and new directions with regard to the health of the public and, as I say, all I can confirm is that we do take it exceedingly seriously.

### **2.8.2 Deputy J.A. Martin:**

In his answer to the obese children he said were being treated, he also said, Sir, the children with problems of anorexia and eating disorders were being treated by the Adolescent and Mental Health Department. Does this not send out a stigma to one side of the... There are problems - over-eating and under-eating - but one is directed to the Adolescent and Mental Health Department. Does he think this is correct, Sir?

### **Senator B.E. Shenton:**

I think the Deputy does have a point there. I think it does send out a bit of a stigma. I think part of the problem with people suffering from anorexia is getting them to take any treatment in the first place. It is certainly something I will take on board and I will have a word with the department about it.

**2.8.3 Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville:**

I would like to take up from Deputy Martin's point that there are people suffering at both ends of the scale, especially young girls with anorexia and I felt that the press headlines were unfortunate to say the least. Could I have the Minister's assurance that his department and he will do all they can to ensure that the press use terminology in a more sensitive way and maybe aim this campaign at healthy eating and better exercise, rather than obesity?

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

Certainly the feedback I have had from members of the public from the recent campaign is that perhaps the message has not been put across as well as it could have been. I think, as every Member of this Chamber will know, that what you pass to the press and what is reported does not always weigh-up. It is a case of healthy eating and healthy lifestyle. It is not just about obesity or anorexia. It is about making sure you get the balance right and this is the message that we do have to get across to everyone and it is the message that we will be getting across to everyone.

**2.8.4 Deputy A.D. Lewis of St. John:**

The Senator may or may not care to answer this question but I was just intrigued as to what is classified as obesity and what is overweight. If he does have the answer to that today, perhaps he could tell us. If not, later. The other thing was is he satisfied that enough is being done - both by his department and perhaps by the Education Department - in informing and advising, particularly young people, of this issue. I understand it is quite extensively treated in schools as public information. Is he satisfied that enough public information is being presented at the moment to deter people from coming up against this problem?

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

We do have a number of healthy eating initiatives going forward and we are working on quite a few at the moment which will be released in 2008. I think, as with most things, we are doing very well but perhaps we could do a little bit better. In terms of what is obese, it is something to do with the body mass index. Over 30 is that you are technically obese but I am told that there is morbidly obese and other definitions to do with it. As I said before, it is about educating people about looking after themselves and making sure that they are the right weight for their height and they do enjoy a healthy lifestyle.

**2.8.5 The Very Reverend R.F. Key, B.A., The Dean of Jersey:**

I hesitate to rise when the subject is being overweight but would the Minister agree with me that there are so many pressures on young people, not least the obsession with parts of the fashion industry of regarding the ideal shape of the female human body to be not unlike the Planning Minister's preferred style of a mobile telephone mast? Can he also assure us that as well as the healthy eating programme, in conjunction with his colleague for Education, Sport and Culture, young people may be taught that their own sense of self-worth does not rest on their physical shape?

**Senator B.E. Shenton:**

My answer is obviously of course we will. The pressure from the media of losing too much weight is something that we are well aware of as is the genuine acceptance that being overweight is okay and I am just a bit more cuddly. We have to get the message across that there is a proper healthy weight and lifestyle that people should be leading. Just to give you some figures, an obese person

dies, on average, 9 years earlier than someone of normal weight while a very obese person's life is cut short by an average of 13 years.

#### **2.8.6 The Deputy of Grouville:**

Would the Minister not agree that it is not just Education, Sport and Culture he should be working with about educating people but also to put over more practical initiatives and work with Transport and Technical Services and Environment and Planning so we can have safe routes to school and cycle tracks?

#### **Senator B.E. Shenton:**

I must admit I had a meeting with the Medical Officer of Health, the other day and she was berating me for the fact that we have been so slow in getting safer cycle routes for schools in place - safer routes for schools - because we have to encourage young people to cycle and to walk more. But I think it is also more to do with working with the retailers and the people in the restaurants and so on and so forth that sell the food to try and make sure that they direct mums or dads towards the more healthy lines and also in restaurants, that they serve more healthy foods to both the young and the old.

#### **2.8.7 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:**

Would the Minister not acknowledge that it is perhaps time for a much more radical approach and rather than preaching at people what is the best lifestyle more and more and thereby turning people off more and more, would he not accept that he ought to take the lessons, for example, from the failure of the school meal campaign in Britain - the Jamie Oliver campaign - and that he ought to get young people much more involved in structuring his campaign rather than trying to preach even more at people?

#### **Senator B.E. Shenton:**

What we are trying to do is very much not preach at people. We want people to buy-in to the healthy eating campaign and we can get them to buy-in by proving to them how advantageous it is to them to follow a more acceptable lifestyle from a health viewpoint. The Deputy tends to use the word "radical" in almost every speech he makes. I think what we have to ensure is that the policy we take works.

#### **2.8.8 Deputy J.A. Martin:**

I would firstly take issue with the remarks of Deputy Le Hérissier. I do not think it is a failed campaign. It is in early days in the U.K. and a lot of effort has been put into it and I would like to see that in our schools but to the Minister of Health, I would say - and following on from the Deputy of Grouville - it is not a one-way street. Do Education and Health talk to each other, because you find somebody - a child of about 13 or 14 - who is maybe slightly overweight will not be picked for the school football or netball team or whatever team. Where do they go to exercise? Fort Regent gym, which is a reasonably-priced gym, you cannot join until you are 14 and private gyms, 16. So I think if you are preaching, Sir - or if Ministers are preaching - healthy eating and exercise, it must be available and it must be reasonably priced. That goes with school canteen meals as well. So I want assurances that the Ministers of Health and Education get down and find some solutions and let these children have access to both the eating and the exercise, at least under at the age of 12 and over.

#### **Senator B.E. Shenton:**

The Health Schools Programme is an important initiative which we have included in the New Directions document. So far, 2 primary schools have achieved health school status, 5 primary schools are working towards this as are 2 secondary schools. Secondary schools have been slightly slower to take up the initiative as they have small catering subcontractors who are struggling to make the contracts pay and are therefore profiting from chocolates, crisps, fizzy drinks, and so on.

We do work very closely with the Education Department within this initiative and certainly I would like to see more youth facilities available on the Island, and I am very keen that we push forward with things like the Millennium Town Park and the skateboard park and anything else that we can do to just give the youth of this Island the facilities to undertake healthy exercise.