

2025.11.11

2.12 Deputy D.J. Warr of St. Helier South of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding prescribing medicinal cannabis for Islanders with serious mental health problems (OQ.254/2025):

Further to concerns raised this year by the Director of Mental Health regarding the practices of prescribing medicinal cannabis for Islanders with serious mental health problems and given that, according to the Cannabis-Based Products for Medicinal Use Dispensing Audit, 6 per cent of Jersey's working population received a prescription compared with 0.05 per cent in England, will the Minister explain what action he is taking in this area to protect Islanders' mental health?

The Bailiff:

Minister, can you hear me?

Deputy T.J.A Binet of St. Saviour (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

Sorry, Sir, I left in my microphone. We are currently taking a number of steps to ensure the protection of Islanders' mental health in this regard. Firstly, Health and Care Jersey have recently introduced the digitised reporting of dispensing data, allowing for the first-time reporting on data up to the previous quarter. This enables an up-to-date understanding of prescribing levels and trends. We are also engaging with the primary care body and cannabis prescribers to work towards digitally connecting patient records between the 2 parties, which, if completed, will be much more efficient than the current arrangement of the prescriber having individually to contact the patient's G.P. (general practitioner) to request the relevant patient information. I think the current situation demonstrates very clearly the need for the Assembly to support the funding required for health digitisation at the forthcoming Budget. Finally, I have also determined that medical-cannabis prescribing should be further controlled in law and work is currently underway to define these controls.

The Bailiff:

Thank you. The clocks in here are wrong of course and mine is more wrong than anyone else's.

2.12.1 Deputy D.J. Warr:

Yes, certainly, I will go ahead with this one. This is in connection with an answer to my Written Question 391/2025. The Minister provided a figure for 2024 prescriptions, of 53,477 prescriptions for 4,000 patients. This equates to 13.4 prescriptions per patient. This is over 100 per cent increase year on year. Could the Minister explain that differential?

The Bailiff:

We are going to pause now and invite Members to stand in remembrance of those who gave their lives in conflict so we can enjoy the freedoms we enjoy today.

[11:00]

[2 minutes silence]

The Bailiff:

Thank you, Members.

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

Sorry to be a nuisance, Sir. I think it would be helpful, certainly for me and perhaps for Members, if the Deputy would be kind enough to read that question again so that I can provide an accurate answer.

The Bailiff:

Yes, of course.

Deputy D.J. Warr:

Certainly, Sir. It was a response to my Written Question 391/2025 for the number of medicinal cannabis patients in 2024. What I wanted to understand was the figure he gave in his answer was 53,477 prescriptions to 4,000 patients. That equates to 13.4 prescriptions per patient. The previous year that was 5.8 prescriptions per patient and the previous year before that was 4.3 prescriptions per patient. Can the Minister just explain why we have seen this extraordinary increase in prescriptions per patient?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

It will probably come as no surprise to the Deputy that I have not really got a great deal of data to be able to back up what I may say. I think that data gathering is going to be crucial for us to resolve what I think has become something of a problem. I do not think I am sharing any secrets or this will come as a surprise to anybody, but we find ourselves in the situation where we have legalised medical cannabis without doing ... well, a previous Assembly has legalised medical cannabis before doing the correct amount of background work. I am led to believe that we are in a situation where somebody who wants or requires medical cannabis can go around to various prescribers during the course of a month and get a month's supply from those various suppliers. It is a very unhealthy situation indeed and that is why we will work at great speed to put that straight.

2.12.2 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

Could I ask the Minister: is the prescription of cannabis any different to other drugs like opioids and is there anything stopping patients from going around to multiple doctors, G.P.s, to get multiple opioids or other prescription tablets issued to them? Is it just a problem that affects cannabis medication?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

To the best of my knowledge, this is confined to cannabis. As I say, I can certainly check that up. I do not want to speak out of turn, but that is my understanding.

2.12.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

I am not sure how that would be the case. I am sure I could go to multiple G.P.s and get different prescriptions for different drugs, but ...

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

I do not ...

Deputy M. Tadier:

... that is not my question, though.

The Bailiff:

What is your question, Deputy Tadier?

Deputy M. Tadier:

Sorry, there is a slight delay. The question really is: does the Minister accept that medicinal cannabis does have a place in the topography of medication in Jersey, that it is an effective medication for many hundreds of people in the Island for different conditions, and that a framework for the responsible prescribing of the drug is going to be welcome?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

Yes, the latter part I can agree with wholeheartedly. I just think I probably need to correct the assertion that you can go to lots of G.P.s and get re-prescribed the same thing. This is probably too complex to go into here, but the G.P.s have a patient record system where all of the G.P.s are signed up to and they have all the right protocols in place to share that information between themselves. When they come to share it with third parties, the governance and audit requirements change quite dramatically. That is the work that we are currently undertaking at the moment. It runs a lot more complicated than certainly I expected and there is a lot of work that needs to be done. But I just want to assure Members that we are doing that work and we have engaged with a lot of very capable people in order to undertake it. So hopefully we can make very real progress in the next 12 months.

The Bailiff:

Deputy Warr, final supplementary.

Deputy T.A. Coles of St. Helier South:

Sorry, Sir, I did have my light on.

The Bailiff:

I am sorry, Deputy Coles. Deputy Coles.

2.12.4 Deputy T.A. Coles:

Can the Minister confirm what data is collected in response to the reasons why cannabis prescriptions are being issued?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

Not to my knowledge. I am sure the data exists but whether that can be centralised at this point in time, I doubt it.

2.12.5 Deputy T.A. Coles:

Does the Minister agree that this data might be crucial before deciding next steps and any sort of regulation around prescribing of cannabis so we understand the reasons why people are being prescribed in the first instance?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

Well, as I say, the emphasis on our part is making sure we have all the right structures in place to gather all the data that we need. That is where our focus is at the moment. I certainly hope that helps to answer the question.

2.12.6 Deputy D.J. Warr:

I am told that people who are getting prescriptions because of the expense are getting a prescription and then selling half of that to somebody else in order to raise funds for their prescriptions. Can the Minister confirm if this is happening?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

I have no direct evidence of that, but in the same way as that information has reached Deputy Warr, it has also reached me. I do not mind saying I think we are in a very unsatisfactory place at the moment, and I do not mind saying either I do not think that is through any fault of ours. However, I do want Members to rest assured that, as I said before, we have some really good people working on this and we are working at speed to try and resolve the problem, because it really is a problem.