4.4 Deputy L.V. Feltham of St. Helier Central of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding additional consultant neurology capacity. (OQ.111/2026)

Further to the Minister's response to Written Question 230/2026, what additional consultant neurology capacity has been secured to reduce the waiting list, and when will patients begin to benefit from this resource?

Senator T.J.A. Binet (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

As the Deputy knows, Written Question 230/2026 was answered on 2nd November of this year, so I am sure it will come as no surprise to the Deputy to hear that nothing substantial has changed in the space of those 8 days. That said, I can confirm that the provision of a good neurological service remains at the very top of our agenda. Indeed, only yesterday, I met again with the Managing Director of Hospital Services, the Deputy Medical Director, the Director of Workforce, and the Chief Operating Officer with this and only this on the agenda. At that meeting, I was updated on a range of actions that are currently underway to recruit 2 full-time neurologists and further efforts to obtain short and medium-term support for this area of work. I have asked for the details of the current initiative to be put in writing, and I am very happy to share those details with the Deputy as soon as they have been completed. In the meantime, I think it is important to mention that currently there is an acute shortage of neurologists, so recruitment is proving really difficult. Hopefully we will have some positive news in the near future, but I am reluctant to put a precise date on that, certainly not at this point in time. I hope that information is helpful.

4.4.1 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Given that this has been a prolonged issue and given the uncertainty that patients face in relation to this, what work has the department done to ensure that patients are well communicated to and that their concerns are listened to, and that any uncertainty that they feel is being dealt with by the department in a compassionate way?

Senator T.J.A. Binet:

It is difficult to describe precise ways of communication other than the fact that I know and trust the team that are in charge of this, and they are doing their very best in, as I know from yesterday, in very difficult circumstances. I do not mind apologising to all the people that are being affected by this. It is a cause of great concern to me, as indeed it is a cause of a great concern to the team involved. I just want everybody to know that nobody is taking this lightly. We are all very concerned about it. A maximum amount of effort is being put in to put the job straight.

4.4.2 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:

I ask this question because I have a constituent currently in this position, and I hope that the answer may be a very simple one from the Minister. Will the Minister commit to working with his Ministerial colleagues, particularly the Minister for Social Security, to ensure that no Islanders are having their benefits delayed or impacted by this? I am thinking particularly around assessments for things like L.T.I.A. (Long Term Incapacity Allowance) and others to ensure that nobody is being impacted beyond just the healthcare, it is also about benefits as well.

Senator T.J.A. Binet:

This is all very true, and I hope that the evidence would suggest that I have a very good working relationship with the Minister for Social Security. I think we have got a great number of email exchanges to prove that we both work very constructively together.

4.4.3 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Could I request, the Minister said he would share the actions with Deputy Feltham; could he share it with all States Members and perhaps consider it being made public as well, please?

Senator T.J.A. Binet:

I am certainly very happy to do that indeed.

4.4.4 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

What does the Minister mean by the provision of a good neurological service and how does that differ from what we currently have?

Senator T.J.A. Binet:

Well we have not got a full complement of the people that we need to run the service. I think we need 2 full-time neurologists, and that is exactly what we are trying to obtain, and we need a full supporting team. I am not a clinician. I am able to get a structure chart of what we are intending to put in place, but I cannot recite that off the top of my head. But there are a number of supporting people that you need to run a good neurological service, and that is exactly what we are trying to establish.

4.4.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

With the Minister's business background he will know about supply and demand, does he think that if people are not coming to Jersey to work in certain roles is it a question that they need to be given more pay and a better package, or if not, what is the problem?

Senator T.J.A. Binet:

All of these things have actually been discussed. It is an extremely difficult situation, because when you start giving completely different terms to one clinician you end up with a snowball effect, and the difficulty is that we can barely cope on the budget that we have, and if we start that process, that is going to be difficult. I will say it is not necessarily the silver bullet that is going to cure all the problems in any event. What I did learn yesterday, which disturbed me, is that the Royal College of Physicians have contacted our senior team to say that some of the negative things that are appearing in the media could be having an adverse effect on our recruitment. I put that out as a message for the media to take heed of that. Sometimes exposing things that we are trying to deal with as comprehensively as we can does not always have the desired effect. In fact, it can make bad matters worse.

4.4.6 Deputy K.M. Wilson of St. Clement:

I hardly think that the media is going to prevent people from coming here for work. The Minister, in his account on 3rd November, states that 42 cases are classified as urgent. Can he advise the Assembly how that urgency is being dealt with, given that if those patients are not looked after urgently, that the prognosis for them will only deteriorate? Can he give us some content and detail as to what he is doing to deal with that?

Senator T.J.A. Binet:

There was a comment before the question, and I would like to comment on that comment. It all forms part of the question and I think we have to be very clear that when we get a message from the Royal College of Physicians telling us, informing us specifically, that what is appearing in the media is causing us difficulties, there must be a reason for that. I say it because I think we should take it seriously.

Deputy K.M. Wilson of St. Clement:

If I may, with all due respect ...

The Bailiff:

No.

Senator T.J.A. Binet:

In terms of the 42 people, each one of those, given that they are on the serious list, will have been coped with differently. I certainly cannot provide a list of the way they are being treated. I am very happy to provide more details in general terms, but that is a very specific and detailed question, which I do not think I could be expected to answer here and now, but very happy to provide a summary of ... perhaps they could be put into categories and I can summarise in writing for the Deputy the actions that have been taken. I will make the point again, the people that are running the service are taking this exceptionally seriously and are

not at all happy about the position that they are confronting. It is a serious matter and it has been taken extremely seriously.

4.4.7 Deputy K.M. Wilson:

I do not accept that we need to have the individual details of the 42 cases. My question was more about what activity is the department undertaking to try to find services that will address the urgency in the form of commissioning or trying to develop new ways of trying to get clinicians over here that will provide the support that patients need at this time.

Senator T.J.A. Binet:

I would like to repeat the paragraph that I made in my original response. I have asked for details of the current initiatives to be put in writing, and I would be very happy that the Deputy and the Assembly and the public get to see that as soon as it has been completed.

4.4.8 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

I have got many questions, but I will go with this one. In the absence of suitable on-Island services, what actions is the Minister taking to ensure that patients have access to off-Island services where that is required and where they have urgent need?

Senator T.J.A. Binet:

We have got a whole network of communication with the people that can provide neurological services. I am satisfied with what was said to me yesterday, that the team is making every effort to work with those services so that people that are particularly on the emergency list can be referred as soon as possible to U.K. providers. I make the point again, I am very happy to share those actions once they have been put in writing.