

2025.07.08

4.18 Deputy T.A. Coles of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding sending notification to patients electronically (OQ.168/2025):

Will the Minister advise what consideration, if any, has been given to sending notifications to patients electronically, including in respect of appointments and confirmations that referrals have been received?

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

I am pleased to confirm that a great deal of consideration has been given to these matters, and, if I may, I would like to address the question in parts. Taking the second question first, I am also pleased to say that work is currently underway to upgrade the hospital electronic patient record system, and this will include the ability to have a patient portal. Once deployed, this portal will allow patients to be notified for referrals and to make and amend outpatient bookings. Over time it will include test and diagnostic results and the current work schedule should allow for this to be rolled out during September of this year. As for the first part of the question, I am afraid there are no direct electronic referrals between primary care, acute, and off-Island transfers, or discharges coming back to the Island. Currently this patient information is moved via email or, worse still, printed paper, which is both inefficient and prone to error. Sadly this situation has arisen due to a woeful lack of investment in digitising the wider health system over a number of years. With that in mind, we have recently developed a comprehensive but unfunded plan to address this, and a much broader range of critical digital health issues. I think Members probably know that very soon I intend to ask the Assembly to consider funding for this vital work to be undertaken, so that in 4 years' time we do not end up in the embarrassing position of having a first class £700 million hospital playing host to a disconnected and fragmented health service. But that will be a decision for the Assembly later in the year.

4.18.1 Deputy T.A. Coles:

Given that missed appointments cost the service lots of money and sending out paper notification also costs the department lots of money, will the Minister confirm that this will be an ongoing priority in any budgeting?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

I think the best thing I can do is refer the Deputy back to the rather comprehensive offer that I gave in the first instance.

4.18.2 Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier Central:

Can I ask the Minister, although all of this work sounds absolutely fantastic, but what does he advise that patients should do in the meantime? I am hearing from patients who go to their G.P. (general practitioner), their G.P. informs them that they have been referred to a department, and they hear nothing from the department to even say that the referral has been received, or whether they are on a waiting list. Sometimes some of these waiting lists for routine appointments are over a year. Can the Minister advise what he thinks patients should be doing in the meantime when there are no communications sent out?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

I think I made it quite clear in my initial answer that we do have problems and that is why we need to address them. It is not something that can be done overnight. What I would advise patients to do in the meantime is to be as persistent as they can and make every effort they can to work their way through the system that we have got. There is no quick fix to this. I have noticed an awful lot of people in that situation choose to write either directly to me or to the Assistant Ministers because our inboxes are full of these issues. We try our best to direct people as best we can going forward. But, as I say, there is no quick fix to this other than investing the money to get the job done properly, and that is going to take time.

4.18.3 Deputy C.S. Alves:

Is the Minister happy for patients to get in contact directly with the department to ensure that at the very least that they have some reassurance that those referrals have been received? I know that previously even myself personally, I have received letters just as a reassurance to say: “We have received your referral and you are on a waiting list” but that has not happened now for at least a couple of years.

Deputy T.J.A. Binet:

I will make the point again that I am aware that there is a great deal wrong with the communications. It is mentioned now very frequently. As I say, we are trying to address things on a sort of piecemeal basis as we go forward, but we do need the structural changes. I would advise patients to make whatever enquiries and phone calls that they can to wherever they can to make sure they get the best care possible. It is not an ideal situation - far from it - but we are looking to address it.