

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION 89/2007

7 September 2007

The Opposition has been approached by two sisters both of whom are affected by a rare disabling genetic condition. The condition requires specialist treatment in the UK and involves periodic attendances at a physiotherapy clinic specialising in treating persons with this condition in the UK itself. This is necessary to retard the progressive effect of this medical condition.

The patients concerned have been informed by the GHA, three days before they were due to go to the UK, that they would not provide the required financial support.

According to the affected parties, who want this information to be put into the public domain, the history of their case is as follows. This condition affects only this one family in Gibraltar and in UK itself the incidence is also extremely low. The four children of the two sisters are all affected by the condition and have all been receiving treatment from Great Ormond Street children's hospital, one of the best institutions for the medical treatment of children in the UK. This has been provided to date at the expense of the GHA who has placed no objection to meeting the cost and there are no difficulties regarding the children.

Because the condition was not recognised here initially, the two sisters, at their own expense, sought a second opinion in the UK some years ago and their condition was diagnosed and identified. The Professor who dealt with their case recommended specialist UK treatment. This was brought to the attention of the GHA at a meeting in February with the Minister and the Chief Executive they were asked to obtain in writing details from the UK Professor who recommended UK specialist treatment.

On obtaining this recommendation in writing from the Professor, as they were asked to do at the meeting, the Government agreed to pay for the treatment.

This was to include referral to a specialist private clinic in the United Kingdom for physiotherapy to deal specifically with their condition since the specialised physiotherapy regime was not available on the national health service in the UK. The Health Authority originally offered to pay for one referral a year for each of the three years. The patients explained to the GHA that they were not in a position to say whether the treatment they required would be at yearly intervals or shorter or longer intervals. That would be a matter for expert advice from the UK which they were told to obtain.

Their physiotherapist in the UK feels that it is essential that the patient returns to UK for review with a specialised physiotherapist expert in this area. The obvious recommendation has been that the patients who are travelling to London next week to see their consultant, should see the physiotherapist at

the same time, which is obviously more economic than having to travel on a different occasion.

Having made all these arrangements, the GHA has advised the patients that they will not pay for the visit to the physiotherapist. This makes no sense whatsoever. The GHA has already accepted that they have responsibility for providing treatment to these patients and have accepted this responsibility by sending them to UK under the sponsored patients scheme. They should therefore do the logical thing and accept the advice of the UK experts given their fondness for UK experts in every other area.

ENDS