

## **STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION**

115/2007 10 December 2007

The Minister for Health Yvette del Agua issued a statement on Thursday repeating the arguments she had used in Parliament in answer to a question from the Opposition regarding re-registration with the health centre.

The Opposition sought an explanation as to why persons who re-registered with the Gibraltar Health Authority were being asked to disclose details about their income. The question was the result of numerous complaints from people who were told that they could not register unless they supplied the information.

In explaining the situation in Parliament, Mrs Yvette del Agua said that such a requirement for persons to declare their income dates back to the days of the AACR.

The Minister referred in her answer to Regulation 6A of the Medical (Group Practice Scheme) Regulations. The Minister added that the GHA used this mechanism to determine whether a person's income was low enough in order to entitle them to added benefits like free house calls and free full dental care, and that this has been done to ensure that they do not miss out on the benefits.

However, regulation 6A is not at all connected with issues like free house calls and free full dental care. This regulation provides for exemption from payment of the annual prescribed fee and the registration fee.

It is logical to assume that these fees are something which would apply to persons who register for the first time. However, the affected parties are pensioners, who have been registered for many years, and who have to register again in order to obtain the relevant health card.

Other than for the purpose of being exempt from these fees, there is also nothing in Regulation 6A to say that people are required to show that their income is below any given level. Pensioners have never previously been asked to declare their income in order to avoid paying fees to the Health Authority. They have always enjoyed free health care on the basis of the social security contributions they have paid during employment.

It is quite clear from the answer given by the Minister that she does not have a clue what she is talking about or else she has misled Parliament and the general public by giving this explanation.

After the exchanges in Parliament last week, people continue to approach the Opposition to complain that they are being asked to provide this information and complete the same forms which they objected to doing.

It should be noted that as a result of further questioning from the Opposition, the Minister said in the House that it was not obligatory for pensioners to provide this information, and that pensioners would still be entitled to be registered if they refused to comply with this requirement.

The Opposition therefore advise those persons who are being asked to provide information that they wish to remain confidential, not to do so, since according to the Minister they are still entitled to be registered under the scheme and receive free health care.

The information that is being demanded of persons registering or re-registering is the following:

- (1) Income from employment ( if any);
- (2) Occupational pension;
- (3) Maintenance allowance;
- (4) Gratuities;
- (5) Other income;
- (6) Interest, dividends and royalties;
- (7) Rents;
- (8) Other profits arising from property.

Furthermore, persons are also being asked to declare that they acknowledge that it is an offence punishable on conviction by a fine or imprisonment to provide any false information. They must also authorise the Commissioner of Income Tax to provide the General Manager of the GHA (presumably Dr McCutcheon), with a copy of his income tax assessment form and the person has to provide the income tax reference number. It is ironic that Dr McCutcheon should find himself in the enviable position of not having to pay the same income tax like most other Gibraltarians, and he is therefore covered by the GPMS Scheme without

having to provide copies of his tax assessment form.

"The Opposition consider that, if it is the case that this form has been around for a very long time, then it should be subjected to a complete overhaul so as to remove the offending paragraphs. It is completely unwarranted and unjustified for the GHA to demand confidential information of this kind in order for persons to be entitled to free health care," said Shadow Minister for Health Neil Costa.

ENDS