

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION
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13 August 2008

In January the Minister for Trade and Industry Joe Holliday opened a hyperbaric oxygen treatment centre off Devil's Tower Road amidst a fanfare of publicity. In his speech at the time the Minister expressed the hope that the new facilities would prove of great help to all.

However, given that the GHA does not refer patients to it then, contrary to the Minister's expectations, it is not going to be of any help to anyone.

Oxygen treatment therapy has been in use in the United Kingdom for over twenty years. The Opposition understands that such treatment is available under the NHS for non-wound healings and for post-operative cancer related problems.

The establishment of the centre in Gibraltar followed five years of campaigning and the specialised chambers were brought over to Gibraltar from the UK in 2005 by James Pratts, who wanted others to obtain the benefit of the treatment which he himself had experienced.

In April this year, Shadow Minister for Health Neil Costa asked the Government in Parliament what the

existing procedure was for persons who are sent by the GHA for treatment at the oxygen treatment centre. This followed representations made by a member of the public who was told that the treatment would be beneficial to his condition but who was having difficulty in getting a referral from the GHA. Mr Costa also asked how many patients had been referred for treatment since the centre opened and how many had actually received the treatment.

In reply, the Minister for Health Yvette del Agua told Parliament that the GHA had not sent any patients at all. She added that a review of policy funding and an assessment of the capability of the unit to provide evidence-based treatment according to the appropriate guidelines would take place very shortly.

In her budget address in June this year the Minister said that there has been ongoing development of the respirology service with bronchoscopy, sleep apnea testing and assessments for oxygen therapy increasing significantly.

The Opposition has been advised that the operators of the centre have still not been categorically told whether or not the GHA will refer patients there. These delays in coming to a decision on the part of the Government and the management of the GHA are causing overdue pain and suffering to many people in Gibraltar.

ENDS

