

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

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The Opposition has been approached by a woman complaining that she has been misled by the GHA into wasting time and effort when they are clearly not able to proceed with routine preventative breast screening for women at present. It is totally unacceptable given the evidence available that risk increases with failure to detect problems at an early stage that the Government should be taking so long to resolve this matter.

This particular person requested a routine mammogram and was assured by the advance booking system that the screening program was in operation. She was given an appointment to see a GP at the Primary Care Centre who had to give the referral. Without any kind of examination, the doctor simply made a note for the Radiology Department and advised that the note had to be given in at that department in the Hospital.

This the woman did but instead of getting an appointment she was simply asked wait to hear from them. Only after the person insisted that a date had to be given did the GHA staff volunteer that in fact the service was not operating and would not operate until the third radiologist was appointed, estimated to take at least four or five months.

It would appear that instead of informing people clearly of this situation when they make enquires, the GHA has issued a set of ridiculous and cumbersome instructions which only serve to hide the fact that there is in fact no routine preventative breast screening facilities in operation at the moment. The last time this specific question was asked in Parliament, the Government advised that the GHA offered a "reduced screening programme service, workload permitting". What has not emerged is that there is so much work at present that this does not permit the programme to operate. It is obvious that people should be told this clearly when they ring up the GHA.

It will be recalled that the Opposition have been pressing the Government on the need to set up a structured routine mammography service at practically every meeting of Parliament. Studies have shown the value and the importance of diagnosing and dealing with breast cancer as soon as possible and that lives can be saved as a result. In 2002 global experts under the World Health Organisation examined the available evidence and concluded that trials provided sufficient evidence for the efficacy of mammography screening of women between 50 and 69 years. In the UK there is free breast screening for all women aged 50 and over. The programme has screened over 19 million women and detected around 117,000 cancers. Much less importantly but significant nevertheless, the GHA itself will also make a financial saving in the long run through early diagnosis.

Commenting on the matter Shadow Minister for Health Neil Costa said:

"In September 2008 the Government told Parliament that plans to set up a structured routine mammography service were quite advanced and that one extra radiologist, who would start work in January 2009, had been recruited for

that purpose. The selection process for the necessary equipment was also underway at the time. However, over a year later we have neither the Radiologist in post nor the equipment up and running as the process has been subjected to delay after delay. The new proposed date for the extra radiologist to start work is now January 2010.

In the meantime the Opposition continue to be approached by concerned women who, in this day and age, consider that the GHA is failing in their duty of care. It must act now without further delay or excuses”.

ENDS