

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

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The Opposition continue to receive complaints from members of the public who are still experiencing problems in obtaining repeat prescriptions at the Primary Care Centre. It is clear that there is plenty of room for improvement in the existing system and that it is failing on a number of grounds.

There are many occasions when appointments are all taken up and a person who requires medication which has run out, or is running out, is unable to obtain a repeat prescription in time from a doctor. In one incident, a person in need of a repeat prescription telephoned the Primary Care Centre for an appointment with a doctor in the last week of September. The caller was asked which doctor he wanted to see. It transpired that the doctor in question was not available until November. The caller then asked to see any doctor and was told that there was about a month's wait until 20th October. The emergency doctor, who was available, does not issue repeat prescriptions. In the end the caller gave up.

The Opposition understands that the only reason why the system has not collapsed completely is because it depends on the goodwill and commonsense of different chemists who issue the medication to known patients on the basis that they will receive the prescription afterwards. If this was not happening then the problem would have reached crisis point with people who need medication unable to obtain it.

It is clear that the present system is not working. At present someone who is not sick as such, but simply needs a repeat prescription for a long-term condition, has no option but to go to the Primary Care Centre and sit in the waiting room along with everyone else. This means that the person is clogging up appointments to see a doctor and preventing people who really need medical assistance from taking up the slot. Moreover, there is also the obvious risk that someone who is not sick may well become sick after a spell in one of the waiting rooms in the Primary Care Centre by catching something from somebody else.

There are many people who are planning in advance for the repeat prescriptions they are likely to need in the future by making bookings with a doctor weeks or even months ahead. This probably partly explains why the average waiting times for advance appointments with the GPs at the Primary Care Centre is about 43 days or six weeks (ranging from 3 days to 98 days).

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

“This is an issue on which we have been pressing the Government for some time. They have acknowledged that the system needs changes because the GHA has been looking at the different models used in the United Kingdom for the issue of repeat prescriptions. The Government must take urgent action on the matter because it is totally unacceptable that people have to continue to put up with the present unsatisfactory state of affairs.”

ENDS