

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

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The response by the Government to the comments made by the Opposition on the system in place for the issue of repeat prescriptions suggests that they do not have a clue about what is actually happening on the ground. It is beyond belief that the Government should question the motives of our Health spokesman Neil Costa and even blame the patients themselves for the obvious shortcomings of the system.

The Government, in line with their usual tactics, once more set out to cloud the issue with red herrings which ignore the central issue. The central issue is that the system in place is not working and that it needs to be changed. The problem, whatever the Government may say, is that there are members of the public, who use the system, and who are very much aware of the difficulty that can be experienced when trying to obtain a repeat prescription from a GP at the Primary Care Centre. Whilst the theory and the protocol outlined by the Government makes very interesting reading, they have to understand that what is actually happening on the ground is very different.

It is an inescapable and incontrovertible fact that persons seeking only a repeat prescription and who in many cases do not require medical attention clog up appointments at the Primary Care Centre. This means that people with a need to see a doctor are unable to do so if all the appointments are taken. Moreover, the problem with the advance bookings that the Government describes in their statement is that doctors are often booked solid for months in advance by people who just want a prescription. Indeed, the figures provided in Parliament by the Government show that the average waiting time to see a GP at the Primary Care Centre is about 43 days or six weeks. This cannot be right.

The second issue is that those persons who need a repeat prescription without needing to see a doctor are made to wait in the same areas as persons who are ill. This creates an obvious problem, particularly for children and the elderly, who may end up catching something from someone else.

The Government is mistaken if it thinks that the cases outlined by the Opposition are isolated cases. This is in fact the norm for many people who want a repeat prescription and who ring up wanting an unnecessary advance appointment with a GP in order to obtain one. The Government is critical of the system that was in place in the past. They ignore the fact that in the United Kingdom it is in fact the norm in many areas that people who need a repeat prescription simply tear off a counterfoil at the bottom of the previous one, insert it in a box and then go to collect the prescription when it is ready. When the GP comes in the next morning, the first thing they do is fill in the repeat prescriptions from the previous day and leave them ready for collection. If a patient needs to

be seen by the GP, presumably they would be alerted by the computer system. This saves on patient time and on GP time.

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

“It is totally unacceptable and pathetic, although entirely predictable and expected, for the Government to question my motives in raising this issue and for them to go even further and put the blame on patients. The problem with this Government is that they can never accept when they have got it wrong – it always has to be someone else’s fault. The Government does not seem to understand, or worse, as they accuse me, if they do understand have deliberately set out to mislead the public, that even though repeat prescriptions are now being issued to patients with certain chronic and stable conditions for a period of up to six months, the system is still not working.

I was told in Parliament many months ago that the GHA was considering options to facilitate the issue of repeat prescriptions for some patients and that two systems in use in the United Kingdom and elsewhere were being looked into. The first where the repeat prescription arises from the doctor’s clinic and the second is where the pharmacist is empowered to prescribe.

The truth is that the Government know full well that the existing system does not work and that many people are unhappy, which is why they are looking into making these changes. The now usual, tired and worn out attacks on me personally, as well as explaining the existing protocols is simply designed to distract people from the central issue, which is the Government’s complete political mismanagement of this important issue.”

ENDS