

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

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In spite of the fact that the Government claims that there are no problems in the provision of repeat prescriptions, it is clear that the system is not working. Further confirmation of this was provided to the Opposition last week following more complaints from members of the public who needed a repeat prescription and were unable to obtain one.

The first problem is that patients who ring up the Primary Care Centre in order to make an appointment with a GP to obtain a repeat prescription claim that the telephone rings and rings and nobody answers it within a reasonable period of time. Callers are told by a recorded message to leave their names and numbers and informed that they would be called back.

Once the first hurdle of actually getting through has been overcome, the next problem is trying to make an appointment. One of the patients was offered an appointment with a doctor in February. In another case a person was told that he could not even be given a date for an appointment at that time because many doctors were sick, on courses or on leave. This means that a person who needs medication is unable to obtain it because there is no doctor available to write a prescription. The Opposition understands that the system is on the verge of collapse because there are doctors who are themselves ill or on courses and this has reduced the number of slots available.

There are many instances where a patient who needs a repeat prescription does not need to have a medical examination by GP, given the nature of the condition the person may be suffering from. In some parts of the United Kingdom, this category of patients is asked to simply tear off a counterfoil, put it in a box and then come and collect the repeat prescription the next day. In Gibraltar everyone who wants a repeat prescription has to see a GP, even though they may not need to. There are times when there are no appointments for GPs available and when the only doctor who has free slots is the Emergency Doctor who, in any case, does not issue repeat prescriptions anyway. This creates a serious problem for service users which is compounded when doctors are themselves sick or away on leave.

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

“The latest incidents suggest that the Government is either unaware of the way in which the system is working in reality, or they are deliberately trying to cloud the issue in order to confuse and mislead public opinion. The truth, despite what the Government have said, is that the system is failing the users of the health service and that urgent changes need to be made. Gibraltar deserves better.”

ENDS