

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

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It is regrettable, to say the least, that once again members of the public continue to complain to the Opposition as to cancelled operations. In fact, the Opposition is concerned at the sharp increase in the number of operations that have been cancelled at St Bernard's Hospital because of bed shortages. The flippant remark by Mr Caruana and Mrs del Agua that operations are cancelled even in the Houston Medical Centre will serve as scant consolation to the many people who continue to be affected by this problem.

The latest figures made available to the Opposition show that for the period from February to May of this year a total of 78 operations were cancelled due to the non-availability of beds. This represents a huge increase from the previous four-month period from October 2009 to January 2010 where the figures supplied to the Opposition show that 10 operations were cancelled for the same reason in that time.

There were a total of 22 operations cancelled due to non-availability of beds in February 2010, 27 in March 2010, 4 in April 2010 and 25 in May 2010.

Given that the Government has had no less than fourteen years to get to grips with this problem, it is totally unacceptable that patients should have to go through the mental trauma of preparing for an operation only to be told, sometimes at the last minute, that this will not happen because there are no beds available. It is a reflection of the policies of this GSD Government and its poor planning capability that this continues to happen at what they like to describe as a "state of the art" facility. It will be recalled that the Opposition warned about this problem when the Government took the policy decision to move the hospital from its old site and put it in an office block at Europort. The problem with lack of beds was simply transferred from one building to another.

In the past the Government have blamed the lack of beds on elderly persons whom they have accused of “bed-blocking”. It will be recalled that an empty ward was recently allocated to the Elderly Care Agency and that a number of elderly patients were decanted into this new ward. It is inexplicable how the shortage of bed space has now deteriorated even further although this new facility has come into existence.

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

“When faced with these criticisms, both Mr Caruana and his Health Minister Mrs del Agua have only offered red herrings and sarcasm. The Government do not seem to understand that this is a problem which is affecting an increasing number of people and one which they have failed to get to grips with over many years. They have had ample time to resolve the matter and they have failed to do so. If they had applied the same energy and resources to this as they have to other things like the construction of a new air terminal building then perhaps people would no longer be affected by this problem. However, they prefer to waste money on grandiose luxuries instead of on real issues that affect real people. The GSD Government’s time is up and they will pay the price with the electorate when an election is called.”