

## **STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION 107/2010**

### **2 August 2010**

The problems faced by persons who have to undergo cancelled operations may well be scraping the bottom of the barrel for the Government, but for those affected it is a serious and important issue which has a disruptive impact on their lives. It is obvious that the Government could not care less and instead of addressing the central point at issue all they can do is respond with personal attacks and red herrings.

The Government have said in their response on Friday that there are operations cancelled in the best hospitals in the world. In the past both Mr Caruana and his Health Minister Yvette del Agua have flippantly declared that operations are cancelled even in the Houston Medical Centre. It is obvious that the Government still do not understand that people are not concerned about what happens either in “the best hospitals in the world” or in the Houston Medical Centre, people only care about what happens to them in Gibraltar when they are booked in for an operation and it is subsequently cancelled often at very short notice. In any case, Mr Caruana and Mrs Del Agua are politically accountable for what happens in St Bernard’s Hospital and not for what happens in the Houston Medical Centre or in the best hospitals in the world.

The Government accept in their statement that 78 operations were cancelled due to a shortage of beds in the four-month period from February to May 2010. The point made by the Opposition was that this represented huge increase from the previous four-month period from October 2009 to January 2010 when the figures supplied to the Opposition show that 10 operations were cancelled. The Government have actually said nothing to explain or account for such a huge increase other than pointing in general terms to the “problem of bed shortages due to acute beds being occupied by elderly people.”

However, an analysis of the number of long-stay elderly persons at St Bernard’s Hospital and the number of cancelled operations does not back up what the Government have said. For example, in January 2010 there were 28 long-stay elderly citizens occupying beds in St Bernard’s Hospital and that month there were no cancelled operations caused by lack of beds. In May 2010 there were 21 elderly citizens occupying beds and there were 25 cancelled operations due to bed shortages. In other words, the number

of cancelled operations was less at a time when there were more elderly people occupying beds.

The latest figures, contrary to what the Government have said, suggest that there appears to be no correlation between one thing and the other. There were no cancelled operations for this reason in November, December and January even though there were respectively 20, 20 and 28 elderly persons occupying beds. However, There were 27 cancelled operations in March, 4 in April and 25 in May even though there were 25, 23 and 21 elderly citizens occupying beds.

The shortage of beds at St Bernard's Hospital, on this scale, is a development that occurred during the mandate of the GSD and while the hospital was still housed at the old St Bernard's. The move of the hospital into an office block at Europort did nothing to solve the problem contrary to the expectations generated by the Government themselves at the time. Indeed, before the move the Government listed the action that they were taking to deal with this problem. They then said that they had designated a bed manager to monitor the situation on a daily basis, that a bed management policy had been drawn up, that there was contact with the Elderly Care Agency, that facilities and that resources were being enhanced at the residential homes for the elderly. They then added, presenting as part of the solution "Of course, it is important to highlight that plans are well advanced for the conversion of Europort into a first class modern hospital."

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

"It is obvious that the "first class modern hospital" imported the same lack of beds problem that existed in the old building, for which they blamed the elderly and their families and which they predicted would be solved by the new hospital. The increase in the number of cancelled operations creates disruption not just for the patients and their families but also to the hospital itself through the non-use of the operating theatres. The stark reality is that behind the usual bluster from Mr Caruana and Mrs Del Agua the problems with cancelled operations caused by bed shortages continue."