

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

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The lack of support from the Government for the hyperbaric oxygen treatment centre off Devil's Tower Road is incomprehensible. The centre was officially opened by the Deputy Chief Minister Joe Holliday in January 2008 when he expressed the hope that it would be of service to all. It is now over two years later and the GHA still refuses to refer patients there for treatment and often sends them outside Gibraltar at far greater expense.

Oxygen treatment therapy has been in use in the United Kingdom for over twenty years. It caters for a wide variety of ailments and conditions and the users of the service report dramatic symptomatic relief and/or accelerated healing. The quality of life of a large number of people who suffer from these conditions is therefore vastly improved as a result of the treatment. It has been known to benefit persons with multiple sclerosis, arthritis and fibromyalgia where patients have been known to regain quality of life, increased mobility and relief from pain. There are a number of applications for many other conditions as well.

The policy of the GHA is that patients are referred to oxygen therapy centers outside Gibraltar where the equipment used operates at above 2.5 atmospheres given that the centre in Gibraltar operates at under that level. However, the users of the service in Gibraltar are convinced of the benefits that they derive from the oxygen treatment that they receive locally which they have to pay for privately. While nobody has ever suggested that this therapy can actually cure people, the evidence from patients themselves is that it certainly makes their lives more liveable and more comfortable, that it alleviates the symptoms and that it may accelerate the post-operative curative processes of the body.

Moreover, the Government would itself make a saving in the long run through what has been described as a simple, safe, effective and economical way to free pressure on the GHA in other areas like visits to GPs, prescription drugs and hospital beds.

Commenting on the matter, Shadow Minister for Health Neil Costa said:
“The Government have confirmed that their policy is not to fund treatment in centres that operate at under 2.5 atmospheres on the basis that this is not done by the NHS. This ignores the reality of what is happening in the ground in Gibraltar as evidenced by the users of the service. I have pressed them in Parliament over the last two years to adopt a more flexible approach but sadly this has not happened and those who want the treatment locally have to pay for it from their own pockets.”