



HM Government of Gibraltar

Ministry of Health, the Environment,
Energy and Climate Change

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Mr Feetham Should Pay More Attention to Parliamentary Statements and less to Facebook Chitchat

Daniel Feetham's first sojourn into the issue of health after taking up responsibility for it within the Opposition has shown how totally inadequate he is for the role. The whole of his recent press release is based on conjecture and rumour, even paying more attention to unresearched Facebook chit-chat than to statements in Parliament.

His comment on the increase in formal complaints is a classic example of how he does not pay attention in Parliament. In response to a recent question, Minister for Health Dr John Cortes explained that the Complaints Procedure had changed last year when it was passed on to the Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Scheme. Since then, minor complaints that would have been dealt with internally and not featured as formal complaints are now recorded formally, meaning that data from before 2015 are simply not comparable to those after. The Minister also explained that complaints are not now brushed under the carpet or avoided, but are actually encouraged, so that they are all fully investigated and improvements effected. This too is a major change that would lead to more recorded complaints. It is not a reflection on the service. Indeed, considering that there are now hundreds more operations performed and about 10,000 more appointments held than just a few years ago, resulting in several hundred thousand patient/clinician contacts, the incidence of complaints is extremely low.

Mr Feetham's respect for Parliament is also called into question by his recent press release. The Opposition has complained in the past when Government has issued press releases on subjects raised by the Opposition in Parliamentary Questions before the questions have been answered in the House. Indeed, the Speaker has ruled that this should not happen. However, on this occasion it is the Leader of the Opposition himself who has chosen to make a public statement on a matter that he himself has raised in a question pending for this week's session!

The GHA can categorically state that no departments have been downsized, or expertise reduced. Indeed, a great deal of training is going on within the GHA, at all levels, from

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enrolled nurse and registered nurse, to specialised health service administration. Over the last three years the GHA has actually increased and improved the number of departments which in most cases has required the employment and training of additional staff. This includes the Day Surgery Unit, Chemotherapy Unit, new Catering Facility, new Mental Health Facility and the soon to open Dementia Day Centre. There has also been huge investment in new equipment. It is typically inconsistent though that he should express concern about downsizing, while at the same time regretting an increase in cost!

Mr Feetham's allegations on referrals to Xanit hospital are also false. In GSD days referrals to Xanit were done without contracts and at private prices. This Government negotiated a contract which reduced prices. There is no outsourcing of procedures that can be done locally to Xanit or anywhere else. Indeed, the reverse is true, the latest example being treatment for Hepatitis C which is now to be done in Gibraltar. What is happening is that with more patients being seen there is a greater overall volume of work. Progress and improved technology in healthcare provides our clinicians with greater choice to diagnose patients leading to more accurate diagnoses, treatment and better outcomes for patients. This is not specific to Xanit but to all tertiary centres.

Moreover, many patients in fact prefer to be sent to Xanit rather than to the UK, given that it is so much more convenient, especially for relatives and friends to visit, and we have seen patients who would in the past have gone to UK now going to Xanit. This is also in fact a cheaper option as flights, accommodation and allowances are not paid at the same levels.

There can of course be no relation between referrals to Xanit and low morale among doctors, if such there was, as it is the doctors who refer patients in the first place!

Once again, Mr Feetham is playing with figures when he mentions cancellations. Whereas there have been more this year than last (but still many fewer than before 2011), the figure of 100 includes, and Mr Feetham chooses to ignore this, cancellations due to such reasons as:

- Surgery is no longer required
- Patient is not fit for surgery
- Patient cancels the surgery for various reasons
- Elective surgery is cancelled at short notice due to an emergency case which takes priority.

And again, Mr Feetham trying to link the departure of a number of surgeons, for various perfectly normal reasons, to cancellations is ridiculous. This has not been the case, as all the surgeons have been covered by locums, and waiting lists remain much lower than in 2011.

Mr Feetham chooses to ignore the many recent improvements at the GHA, like Day Surgery, which has resulted in hundreds more operations now being carried out, or the chemotherapy suite that has already seen its first patients, or the investment in training such as the hugely successful Advanced Trauma Life Support Course two weeks ago, which showed doctors, nurses and paramedics training together at a high level of morale.



“The GHA is doing much more health care than ever before, and this will of course cost more,” commented Minister for Health Dr John Cortes. “The new departments and procedures we have introduced, which include a ward, three operating theatres, a day surgery unit, a chemotherapy suite, an expansion to A&E, a whole new mental health facility at Ocean Views, as well as greatly increased patient turnover, and screening for bowel cancer and other conditions, necessarily results in increased costs. But it has resulted in real outcomes and lives have most definitely been saved. I am proud to say that I am surrounded by excellent, well-motivated professionals who deliver a standard of healthcare unequalled in any community of our size. Mr Feetham should pay less attention to spurious comments on Facebook and share in the deep sense of pride that all in our community should have in our health services.”