



# HM Government of Gibraltar

Ministry of Health, the Environment,  
Energy and Climate Change

## PRESS RELEASE

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### Minister for Health Statement on Budget Policies

The Minister for Health Dr John Cortes, in response to the statement by the Equality Rights Group, has commented that the Budget Speech is necessarily just a summary of what is happening or planned. "At an hour and a half my speech was long enough already, and every initiative could not be spelt out," commented Dr Cortes.

He added, "The ERG seems to imply that there are 'moral and religious concerns' in defining GHA policy on sexual health. This is simply not the case. GHA policies are evidence-based, informed by the medicine and the science, and usually follow UK Guidelines, such as those issued by NICE, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. As a scientist myself, I feel this is especially important."

The Minister has stated that the repatriation of the HIV and Hepatitis clinic, which he covered in his speech, is a vital step, which he is pleased that the ERG has welcomed, but that it is not the full story.

"'Secrecy'", he stated, "is not the *modus operandi* of the GHA, but we do take patient confidentiality very seriously. There is no negativity either, as all the health professionals are there to assist all service users in any way possible."

The HIV clinic has been set up locally in response to comments from service users, and the problems that they have encountered when having their appointments in Spain. Initially, all the service users were very hesitant regarding having the clinic here due to their perception that this may not be confidential. However all are now happy with the current local set up, and this has been on-going since December 2015.

Although there is still no centralised clinic per se, a sexual health service is being provided and all persons wanting a sexual health check can access this service via the GP, Nurse Practitioner, A&E or the Infection Control Officers.

Current sexual health provision includes screening for:



- Hepatitis B
- Hepatitis C
- HIV
- Treponema (syphilis)
- Chlamydia and Gonorrhoea

Treatment is in line with the guidance of the British Association of Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH) for the management of sexually transmitted infections, which have been used in treating different infections over the years successfully.

Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) is also offered to those at high risk exposure of HIV transmission and under the guidance and management from the British HIV Association (BHIVA). Persons exposed can attend A&E where their exposure risk will be assessed and a 5 day PEP pack given. If needed, they will then be seen by a Consultant and followed up.

Although not the ideal place to attend, the Infection Prevention and Control department has, since 2013 seen an increase of service users making contact for sexual health checks. No complaints have been made about the service by users: rather, they are accessing services regularly to keep on top of their health.

GHA statistics have shown service users accessing the service have increased as follows:

- 2013 – 53
- 2014 – 74
- 2015 – 87
- 2016 to date – 91

From next September, sessions on sexually transmitted infections and on contraception will be delivered by GHA health professionals at secondary schools. Leaflet campaigns are also planned to highlight safe sex for men who have sex with men, plus posters and leaflets on how and where they can access sexual health care.

On the note of Hepatitis, which is increasing worldwide, the GHA will in future deliver treatment and monitor Hepatitis C patients locally.

The relevant staff have also undergone and are undergoing additional specialised training.

While there is a great deal of ground yet to cover, work is nevertheless ongoing in improving the provision of service in this area, with some improvements already evident.

Dr Cortes ended, “The ERG know that they are very welcome to discuss any and all of their concerns and aspirations with me and I look forward to meeting with them again soon.”