



GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR

Minister for Health & Civil Protection

Floor 7, Block 1, St. Bernard's Hospital, Harbour Views Road

Gibraltar

Telephone: (350) 20072266 Ext. 2005/2006 Fax: (350) 20059942

PRESS RELEASE

PR NO:101/2009

DATE: 18th May 2009

Government considers the Opposition's criticism of the GHA's mammography service to be a deliberate misrepresentation of the facts, given the repeated comprehensive explanations given in Parliament to Opposition spokesman, Neil Costa, by the Minister for Health.

The GHA provides a one-stop mammography clinic for persons (usually women) who present with symptoms, and are considered by the doctor to be at risk.. The GP, who invariably is the patient's first port of call, will refer a patient who in his clinical opinion meets the above criteria, to St Bernard's Hospital. The mammogram is performed and a diagnosis is provided immediately. This excellent service, which involves multi-disciplinary instant consultation between the GP, the Radiologist and the Surgeon, was introduced by this Government in 2005.

As a next step in the Government's structured approach to women's health care, it decided to introduce a breast screening programme for all women over 40. This was announced as a manifesto commitment during the 2007 elections. Since then, the GHA has been working in an expeditious manner towards the delivery of this new service. The GHA has already recruited the necessary staff, including a dedicated breast care nurse, and has identified, evaluated and ordered the necessary equipment. As Mr Costa is aware, the only reason why this service is not yet being delivered is the numerous unsuccessful attempts that the GHA has encountered in recruiting a Radiologist.

This Government's track record on the provision of high quality health care to this community in general is manifestly evident in the huge investment it has made in providing a new Hospital and in the introduction of many new services, the breast screening programme being just one of them. This Government also takes women's health issues per se very seriously. Testimony to this is the introduction of the Human Papilloma Virus Vaccine, which is capable of preventing cervical cancer, a killer disease amongst women, the one-stop breast clinic introduced in 2005 and the new breast screening programme which will be delivered as soon as the GHA is successful in recruiting a third Radiologist.

Health Minister, Yvette Del Agua said: “this is just another example of the Opposition’s systematic attempts to time-manage Government’s own manifesto commitments. Mr Costa is perfectly aware that the GHA is not yet able to deliver this enhanced service for reasons outside its control. It is obvious that the Opposition’s apparent concern for women’s health issues has arisen very recently. Only 18 months ago the Opposition published a manifesto which was absolutely devoid of any measures directed at women’s health. It did not include a commitment to implement a breast screening programme and neither did it include a commitment to introduce the Human Papilloma Virus Vaccine, the two most important cancer detection and prevention mechanisms available to women. It is therefore odd that Mr Costa should now be criticising Government for “taking too long” in doing something that the Opposition had no intention of doing itself if it had been elected into office.”