



PRESS RELEASE

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The Government notes that once again Opposition spokesman for Health, Neil Costa, fires from the hip and makes incorrect assumptions in his haste to jump on what he obviously sees as a potential political bandwagon.

In the latest opposition statement which is critical of the GHA's mammography services, Mr Costa goes to great lengths to repeat what is obvious to everyone, i.e. that the GSD included a commitment in its 2007 manifesto to provide a structured routine breast screening programme for all women over 40, and that this has still not been implemented. He then goes on to link the delays to the GHA's dismissal of one radiologist and the suspension of another. Finally, he goes on to give details of the research which he alleges was carried out in 2002 and which proves that mammography screening can reduce deaths from breast cancer, obviously believing that he is in a position to teach grandmother to suck eggs.

What he conveniently fails to highlight is the fact that the GSD Government was the only political party to have the foresight to include it as a commitment in its 2007 manifesto, a commitment which the staff of the GHA have been working very hard to achieve. It is a pity that Mr Costa did not carry out his diligent research and arrived at his conclusions earlier, so that the Opposition could have also committed to a structured breast screening programme, something which they failed to do in both their 2003 and 2007 manifestos.

Mr Costa is also incorrect in his assumption that the dismissal of one radiologist and the suspension of another "is a case of going back to square one". The Minister for Health, Yvette Del Agua, said "Mr Costa will, I hope, be pleased to hear (at least for the sake of the women of Gibraltar if not for the political embarrassment that this will cause him) that the pilot breast screening programme which I said we expected to commence in the spring of 2010, is today on target. It is not a case of the GHA going back to square 1, as Mr Costa claims. The GHA is in the process of negotiations with UK accredited providers to implement a model of breast screening using Teleradiology. A GHA steering group has been set up to carry out due diligence in the selection process to ensure that we meet the recognised standards of performance outlined by 'Quality Assurance Guidelines For Breast Screening Radiology, NHSBSP January 2005'".

Government therefore considers Mr Costa's knee-jerk reaction to be completely unfounded. However, if it were true (which is not the case) that the dismissal of one radiologist and the suspension of another would have had a negative impact on the commencement of the breast screening programme, the Government would have still supported the GHA in the disciplinary action that it has taken, despite any political consequences that this would have brought for the Government.

The Opposition's covert support for the two Radiologists (through their party political organ) is completely irresponsible and Government is convinced that the general public will condemn that support once the Government is in a position to reveal the real facts surrounding the disciplinary action taken by the GHA.