



GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR
PRESS OFFICE
No.6 Convent Place
Gibraltar
Tel:20070071; Fax: 20043057

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The Government considers that the Opposition is once again scraping the bottom of its political "bad news" barrel simply because it's time to find something to criticise the Government for.

In its latest statement regarding cancellation of surgery at St Bernard's Hospital, the Opposition Spokesman for Health, Neil Costa, accuses the Government of "failing to get to grips with this problem". Mr Costa refuses to accept that cancellation of surgery due to unavailability of beds, however undesirable, is something that happens regularly in all the best hospitals in the world, and used to happen with the same frequency in the old St Bernard's Hospital during the GSLP administration. His mantra that operations cancelled in Gibraltar are due to the fact that St Bernard's Hospital was not built from scratch but was converted from an office block, and that it does not have enough beds is absurd. Using that yardstick, no hospital in the world which has been purpose built should be cancelling operations at all.

This Government took the decision to provide 133 acute beds at the new hospital, although all the recommendations from experts at design stage pointed to 80 beds for a population of our size. Whilst having to cancel 78 operations during the 4 month period in question, the GHA managed to perform nearly 1,000, despite the fact that 25 beds were occupied by elderly people who had been medically discharged, and another 25 by patients with long-term illnesses, most of whom were also elderly.

The Minister for Health, Yvette Del Agua, said: "At the time that Government opened Cochrane Ward, it made the point that this was an interim measure which would alleviate the pressure but would not resolve the problem of bed shortages due to acute beds being occupied by elderly people. Despite the very significant measures that this Government has introduced, including the provision of sheltered accommodation for the elderly, the introduction and continuous expansion of domiciliary care and the doubling of beds in Mount Alvernia, coupled with its plans to provide a new dementia facility and a new residential home for the elderly, Government will never be able to guarantee that beds in hospital will not continue to be occupied by elderly people who do not require hospitalisation, inevitably resulting in a shortage of beds for surgery.

Ironically, in what can only be seen as a blatant application of double standards on the part of the Opposition, at the same time that Mr Costa criticises the GHA for cancelling surgery due to unavailability of beds, his colleague, Fabian Picardo, wearing his lawyer's hat, places undue duress on the GHA's Chief Executive to retain someone in hospital purely on social grounds, despite the fact that the person had no need for hospitalisation. Unashamedly, Mr Picardo subsequently used "his client" as a political pawn with which to lambast the GHA's Chief Executive, when the latter arranged for the person to be sent home.

When Mr Costa has a slightly better and broader understanding of how the health service operates, and when what is mathematically and sociologically self-evident finally sinks in, he will understand that it is a nonsense to say that the hospital does not have enough beds, or to call for a guarantee that no operation will be cancelled due to bed shortages".