



PRESS RELEASE

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Following the recent exchange of statements over dental services for children, the Government is not surprised that Opposition spokesman for Health, Neil Costa, is now accusing the Minister for Health of “bringing information into the debate which is not relevant”.

It is obvious that Mr Costa does not like to be reminded of the GSLP’s track record when in Government, and he therefore automatically uses the argument of irrelevance as a smokescreen to divert the public’s attention from the realities of the Opposition’s many failures when in office.

The Minister for Health, Yvette Del Agua, has said:

“Mr Costa’s accusation that I have misled the public by manipulating figures is rejected outright. The fact is that 16,000 appointments were given to children over the past year, the majority of which were routine cases. In no way does this statement contradict what I said in Parliament. Whilst not being able to provide the exact and precise number of routine appointments, it is pretty obvious, by the mere definition of the word routine, that appointments of this nature are done on a much more regular basis than emergencies. The bottom line is that the staff at the dental department are not aware of any child waiting to see a dentist since 2007.

The Government maintains and upholds that the dental service offered to children in Gibraltar is of a very high standard. I agree with Mr Costa that everything is relative, and that the public expects all Governments to increase resources and improve its services during its tenure in office. What Mr Costa fails to point out, however, is that during the 8 years that the Opposition was in Government, they failed to increase the number of dentists at all. The complement of dentists in 1988, when the GSLP came into office was 2. The number of dentists when they left in 1996, was still 2. To boot, when one of the dentists was medically boarded in 1991, he was not replaced until 2 years later. Considering that the population of children of school age has remained static, the demand on the dental service at the time was the same as it is today. Yet the Opposition did not deem it necessary to increase the dental complement or improve the dental service, resulting in the majority of children never being able to access a dentist.

In comparison, this Government doubled the complement of dentists during its first 6 years in office. One was added in 1998 and another in 2002. Subsequently, this Government has proceeded to add another two dentists in 2008, bringing the total complement to 6. Therefore, using Mr Costa's yardstick and comparing apples to apples, it is blatantly obvious that his "relativity" argument has backfired on him.

I find it extremely odd that out of the long list of parents that Mr Costa has now identified as allegedly having complained to him about the dental service, (as opposed to the one case that he mentioned in his last statement) all of them have rejected my offer of assistance on the basis, according to Mr Costa, that they feel intimidated by me. I would again reiterate that my door remains open and I once again commit myself to have all the alleged shortcomings of the GHA that are brought to my attention, investigated".

The Government will continue to improve its health services, including the Dental Department, as it has done until now. Whilst it is understandable, for obvious reasons, that Mr Costa does not want the public to be reminded of the past, the Government will continue to defend its excellent track record and will not hesitate in comparing it to the abysmal track record of the GSLP when in Government"