

**GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR****Ministry for Health & Environment****Floor 7, Block 1, St. Bernard's Hospital, Harbour Views Road
Gibraltar****Telephone: (350) 20072266 Ext. 2011/2012 Fax: (350) 20059942****PRESS RELEASE**

PR NO: 32/2012

DATE: 17th January 2012**Opening of Calpe Ward**

Minister for Health Dr John Cortes has announced that the Government has approved the opening of Calpe Ward in St Bernard's Hospital. The Gibraltar Health Authority and the Care Agency have already put the necessary steps in motion to equip and staff a new 18 bed unit in order to relieve pressure on beds and allow capacity for acute cases and for surgery. This will prevent patients having to wait overnight in the Accident & Emergency Department and will avoid the need to cancel elective surgery. Elderly patients, in particular, will be able to move into this ward and allow space in the acute wards. This measure will enable the GHA to provide beds for acute cases, which had been lost due to the lack of commitment to and understanding of Gibraltar's health needs by the former GSD Government.

In reply to the press release from the Opposition, the Government notes that there is nothing disingenuous about its original statement. The inescapable proof of the short-sighted and failed planning by the GSD is evident in the structural bed shortage that has existed throughout the last eight years in the new St. Bernard's Hospital.

Whilst the Government accepts an increase in beds for the elderly under the GSD, such extra capacity, as seen in the light of the increasing operation cancellations, was clearly insufficient. The GSD simply did not have the foresight to increase resources in community and domiciliary care and the support required given the reality of a growing elderly population. In fact the GSD appeared to opt for tackling the problem by wanting to institutionalise our elderly. The spectacular failure of the GSD to factor in the growing elderly population and the impact on cancelled operations is confirmed by the Opposition's reference to the three projects they initiated in government, which, it should be noted, took the GSD fifteen years to commence and which were nowhere near completion when the election was called.

The opening of Calpe Ward by the Government will relieve critical short-term needs. Unlike the previous administration, this Government recognizes that this is not a long-term solution given that it is virtually certain that the additional beds will also be occupied in the medium term by long term residents. For that reason, the Government, together with the Gibraltar Health Authority and the Care Agency, are working within a policy to further and adequately increase the overall provision for Dementia and Alzheimer patients. To that end, the Government has commenced a professional assessment of Gibraltar's needs in order to develop an Alzheimer and Dementia Strategy which will include considering ways of boosting the community health service and domiciliary care.

Contrary to the baseless accusations of the GSD, the new Minister for Health, Dr. John Cortes, evidently has more of a grip on the realities of Gibraltar's health needs than the former administration after their failed policies in eradicating these problems. The Government, with just a little over a month in office, has already taken firm and decisive short-term action whilst considering long-term solutions.

It is the height of political hypocrisy for the GSD to suggest that the new Government is somehow accountable for the systematic failure of the previous GSD administration to resolve the issue of bed shortage and to claim that the one-month old Government should not have pointed the finger at the now Opposition. The Government will not hesitate to fulfil its duty to further bring the many failures of the former administration into the public domain and especially any that were concealed for electoral purposes.