



PRESS RELEASE

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GHA Board Meetings: Opposition call for secrecy instead of openness

Opposition spokesman for Health Isobel Ellul-Hammond is showing the hypocrisy now typical of her party in her totally unjustified criticism of the new policy of open meetings of the Gibraltar Health Authority. As she well knows as a former Board member, the last Government, whose running of Authority meetings she herself criticizes in her statement, did not allow any discussion of any policy, much less development of policy, and in fact discouraged Board members themselves from raising motions. So much so that in 2011 at least two meetings did not attract a quorum.

Health Minister, Dr John Cortes, who was himself a member of the Board from 1992 to 2007, confirms his frustration during GSD tenure not only of the 'top down' running of Board meetings, but of the sucking up of any power from the GHA and even the Minister to No 6 Convent Place where most significant decisions were taken. These included direct appointments of senior staff and control of the relief cover budget.

The GSD also totally disempowered Clinicians, doing away with the Management Board, set out in law, and replacing it with an executive with neither hospital doctors nor general practitioners sitting on it, despite express legislation requiring this.

Ms Ellul-Hammond publicly criticises the contribution of non-executive members of the Authority, implying that they are either shy or stage-struck, when one of them is an experienced retired senior nurse, and another a

practicing lawyer, both of whom were members during the time of the GSD. The Chairman of the Authority, Dr John Cortes fully supports all the members who have a tremendous contribution to make.

Her criticism of the in-camera part of the meeting is ridiculous and insensitive. The Gibraltar Health Authority as a professional body will not discuss matters related to individual patients or staff members in a public forum. It has a duty to protect their privacy and anonymity. It is such sensitive matters that are of necessity dealt with outside the public domain.

She is clearly opposed to meetings in public, and therefore to openness, preferring instead secrecy where the unacceptable practices of the past cannot be scrutinized.

The reports presented at the meeting provided to the public more information than ever before about the running of the GHA, information which she herself has taken advantage of in questions in Parliament. This is proof if proof were needed of the amount of scrutiny that the GHA is prepared to undergo as it strives to improve the health care provided to the community.

The reports were subjected to incisive question from a number of board members, and the policy on Colorimetry was clearly subject to discussion and amendment. Its acceptance reflects nothing other than the fact that it was a well researched and well worked out policy, the work of the GHA's excellent professionals. Ms Ellul-Hammond's suggestion that it was a top down policy verges on an insult to the integrity of the members.

What the Opposition member did not like was having to sit in to hear of all the new initiatives and improvements that the GHA and Government are already achieving in the health service. She must have been uncomfortable to realise that so much has been achieved in such a short time, including a £3.3 million equipment and works budget (compared to £800,000 last year), the empowering of Nurse Practitioners after years without being able to prescribe, and the rapid introduction of Smoke-free legislation.

The opportunity for members of the public to make representations and ask questions is also belittled by the Member who seems to be overwhelmed by a glut of democracy after so many years of democratic deficit.

There were more questions asked by members at this week's GHA meeting than in many UK Trust Board meetings. Also, Trust Boards in the UK do not usually invite members of the public to contribute. It might be worth asking Ms Ellul-Hammond what she fears about open and honest debate.

Despite her, the Board's function will continue to evolve after years of stifling stalemate.

Health Minister, Dr John Cortes commented that the open meetings represent a quantum leap in the opening of healthcare to the community. "There is still a long way to go in getting our health service up to the level it deserves to be.

But the Opposition is clearly worried that a health care revolution has already commenced. Ultimately, people judge you by what you do not by what Isobel says."