



HM Government of Gibraltar

Ministry of Health, the Environment,
Energy and Climate Change

PRESS RELEASE

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Healthcare provision continues to improve

The Opposition's latest press release reveals their understanding of the health service to be lower than it has ever been, reliant on hearsay to draw preposterous conclusions. Casting judgment on the work of over a thousand staff based on periodic difficulties at point of access shows total lack of any depth of understanding. The Opposition's policy-making method – or lack thereof – is an insult to the electorate and to the hard working staff of the GHA.

Every year the Primary Care Clinic (PCC) and Accident and Emergency (A&E) face increasing demands on their services. All staff are working hard to introduce the procedures recently put in place to meet this, specifically the extremely welcome electronic patient record system launched on 24th June. The computer-based system means that for returning patients note retrieval will be totally reliable, processes will be quicker, and patient records are safer and more secure than ever before. The delays experienced during the implementation phase will now be reduced as staff are being fully trained to use the new system and further patient slots will be opened in the coming weeks. Significantly, the introduction of the electronic record has already resulted in a great improvement in the quality of care that staff are able to provide.

Moreover, the number of General Practitioners at the PCC is being increased, from 16.5 in 2011 to 22, which will further improve the service and offer more choice to patients. The number of A&E doctors has also been increased and an Associate Specialist in A&E has been appointed. This is part of holistic strategy of instituting sustainable, long-term improvements including the construction of more clinics at PCC and 24 hour reception cover at A&E.

Cancellations of operations are down tremendously following the opening of the Day Surgery in 2014: only 3 cancellations in 2014, down from 118 operations cancelled in 2010 and 114 in 2011. Most of the 21 cancellations of 2015 were a result of one episode following over 20 emergency admissions over a single weekend – which clearly had to be given priority. Every cancellation is regretted but all such operations are immediately rescheduled and performed within a couple of weeks. This is enabled by the joined-up policymaking that has resulted in four operating theatres, including the third one in the

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HM Government of Gibraltar • Duke of Kent House, Cathedral Square • Gibraltar GX11 1AA

t +350 20066491 f +350 20066706 e mhe@gibraltar.gov.gi w gibraltar.gov.gi



main theatre suite and a day surgery theatre, with a fifth theatre now in the advanced planning stages. It is important to note that pre-2011 only one operating theatre was in regular use, with a second as a backup, and so the number operations carried out has rocketed, from 2887 in 2010 to a projected 3945 by the end of this year. These increase of over 1000 operations is a good thing: as we have more doctors and more visiting consultants, more patients are being diagnosed and treated than ever before. It is also clear that the increased demand is being effectively met. For example, the General Surgery waiting list is half what it was in 2012, the Gynaecology waiting list stands at eight patients compared to 73 in April 2012, the orthopaedic waiting list now has 55 patients on it compared to 153 in March 2013, and the plastic surgery list has been reduced from 154 to 68. The success of the opening of the Day Surgery is clear.

The services and capabilities of the GHA are being revolutionized. The new Dementia and Alzheimer's residential unit is in the final planning stages with an improved design and the John Mackintosh Wing on the site of the old hospital has added 54 more beds for the elderly over and above the 19 in Calpe Ward. But more beds alone do not constitute a healthcare policy and, therefore, the Government has also invested in and will very soon be opening a new Day Centre to provide day care for up to 90 elderly service users, enabling them to return to their own homes in the evening. This combination of initiatives will ensure that St Bernard's Hospital continues to be a genuine acute hospital and that the best quality of care is provided.

Since 2011 the number of nurses has been increased by over forty, and training of enrolled nurses has been started, giving career prospects to nursing assistants for the first time in over a decade. The horrible KGV has finally been closed and replaced with the outstanding Ocean Views Mental Health Unit. Health promotion and screening have progressed as never before, with the introduction of colorectal cancer screening and screening for abdominal aneurysms of the aorta, both of which have already saved lives. There are other initiatives the planning stages, at different stages of completion, including the new kitchen and a new way of preparing and providing food for patients, the move of the third ambulance to the GHA, improvements to the haematology/warfarin service, the service provided to HIV and Hepatitis patients, the setting up of a dedicated stroke service, and others to be announced shortly.

Minister for Health, Dr John Cortes, commented: "I have personally witnessed the enthusiasm of the catering staff training in the use of their new facility, have met with the highly motivated and proactive staff at the Primary Care Centre to discuss improvements, and have visited a class of Nursing Assistants starting their enrolled nurse training. Their dedication was evident and is to be commended. Over the past four years the GHA has improved to the point of being unrecognizable, with its central focus on patient welfare. The problems of massive cancellations without reprieve, of inefficient use of operating theatres, the huge waiting lists in orthopaedics, gynaecology and general surgery, and shortage of nurses, are over. The new electronic record is being introduced, and, when it is fully rolled-out over the next 18 months will make everyone's care safer and more effective. There are challenges still ahead, and there will always be things we can do better, and do them better we will. For me – for us – this is only the beginning."