

Information Further to Ministerial Answers

Information further to the supplementary question to OAQ21201, issued by Rhodri Morgan, the First Minister, on 13 January 2003

To Nick Bourne:

I am writing to you in response to your supplementary question to OAQ21201 on 17 December 2002, which, in effect, asked me to intervene to ensure that Mr David Thompson of New Inn, Gwent, received treatment to remove a tumour, following the cancellation of this treatment on four occasions by Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust. Intervention would be as inappropriate for me as it would be for the Minister for Health and Social Services, given that it could impact on clinical decisions, which must be left to those qualified to take them. I did undertake to investigate the matter with Jane Hutt and send you a reply.

I understand that officials have been in contact with Mr Thompson, and friends and relatives of his who had telephoned the Welsh Assembly Government on his behalf, and who were informed, as above, that neither Ministers nor officials could intervene in such cases, but we could raise this with the trust concerned, which could then discuss the case directly with Mr Thompson. He received treatment on 18 December.

Postponing operations is distressing to patients and we are working with the service to minimise this. Postponements do occur when there is a rise in demand, particularly during the winter and the unpredictable nature of emergency admissions makes this difficult to eliminate.

The levels of cancelled operations across Wales are closely monitored by the Welsh Assembly Government as part of a programme aimed at clarifying the reasons and minimising their occurrence. Our current guidance to the national health service states that when an urgent operation has to be cancelled, the trust chief executive should become involved in the actions being taken to set a new date for the operation. He or she should also explain to the patient, their family or carer, the reason for the cancellation, the new date set and the actions being taken to ensure this is met.

In addition, the new 'Health and Social Care Guide for Wales' states that

'your operation should not be cancelled after you are admitted to hospital, or on the day of surgery, for reasons which have nothing to do with your medical condition. If it is, you should have your operation within 28 days. If this is not possible, the hospital will arrange for you to be told, within 28 days, of the new date for your operation.'

Besides greatly increasing the financial resources available to the NHS in Wales, this administration has taken a number of steps specifically to increase its capacity and efficient use of capacity.

With regard to critical care, in 2001 Jane Hutt convened an all-Wales critical care group, which includes representatives from all those specialities involved in the provision of critical care services. The group is reviewing the current provision of adult critical care services in Wales and considering the development and delivery of future services on a strategic basis.

The group has developed a set of critical care standards, which will be implemented in Wales via a services framework to ensure that in future appropriate and adequate critical care services are available across Wales. The next stage of the group's work will be to carry out an audit of current services provision across Wales to establish areas of inadequacies and inappropriate use of services to ensure that current provision is being utilised to its full potential.

More generally, a recent report on capacity in NHS Wales, 'A Question of Balance', recognises the need to take a whole-systems approach. It recognises that all sectors need to work together in order to strike the right balance between demand and supply, emergency and elective workloads. It recommends that service

changes should be introduced to enhance capacity and the Assembly's innovations in care team have been helping to modernise services and improve access to care for patients.

In October, Jane Hut announced an extra £7 million to help the NHS and social care sector this winter. Another £5 million will be allocated in 2003-04 and will help to fund early discharge schemes and initiatives to keep people out of hospital, thereby alleviating the pressures that can lead to the postponement of operations. The Royal Gwent Hospital in Newport is planning to open a new emergency admissions unit in the next few months, which will be led by two new emergency physicians. This facility should help further in reducing the level of admissions and reduce pressure on beds.

I thank you for your interest in this matter and for giving me the opportunity to outline some of the guidance and initiatives in place, backed by extra funding, to help alleviate pressures on our health service and limit the postponement of treatment for patients.

**Information further to OAQ21211 issued by Rhodri Morgan, the First Minister,
on 20 January 2003**

To Alison Halford:

I am writing to you in response to your OAQ21211 on 17 December, about the funding of security measures at Mostyn docks. I understand that you raised this matter with the Finance Minister and she provided you with a written response on 26 July.

As the Minister advised you, the Assembly is unable to comment on the specific details of the finances of counter-terrorist operations. The funding arrangement for security arrangements at Mostyn docks are the same as those for all major ports in the United Kingdom, and the chief constable is entirely content with the current funding programme.