

# Health Minister pledges to address public's concerns

Minister of Health and Human Services Hon. Dr. Lillian Boyce has pledged to address a number of concerns that have been raised by the public, as part of a comprehensive effort to improve the portfolios under her charge.

Speaking during the budget debate, Hon. Boyce said that since assuming this ministry just over a year ago, she became more acutely aware of a number of social, demographic and health issues that have been lurking beneath the surface and below the radar and which the public has been continuously complaining about.

These, she said, included concerns about the quality of the health care delivery, understaffing issues in the health and social services sector, pharmaceutical problems, concerns about garbage collection and disposal, backlog of dental cases and the need for a larger dental department, small pockets of poverty, and customer service issues throughout the ministry.

“All of these are important areas which are engaging the urgent attention of the staff in the various departments in my ministries. The people of the Turks and Caicos Islands can rest fully assured that no effort will be spared until these pressing issues are effectively dealt with,” she said.

In relation to the two new hospitals being built in Grand Turk and Providenciales, Hon. Boyce said she was sure she was speaking for the majority of Turks and Caicos Islands by saying that the completion of these hospitals will be among our most cherished dreams.

“How on earth can we be telling the world that we are building a modern society and economy, marketing ourselves as a high-end destination and boasting of being the most rapidly developing country in this part of the world, and yet be unable to have a world-class health care facility for our people. It just would not make sense. As a small country our development must be seriously driven by our own national priorities, and these hospitals, which are being presently constructed on schedule, are definitely a national priority,” she said.

She said one of the principal reasons why TCI must have its own hospitals is because the Medical Treatment Abroad continues to be a significant recurrent expenditure item with overall expenditure in the 2007-08 fiscal year of approximately \$30 million dollars.

She noted that there was a significant increase in the number of new patients and patients requiring repeat visits compared to previous years. Cancer and the complications of chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension, namely kidney failure, heart attacks and heart failure, continue to be the major reasons for referrals abroad, and the conditions that incur the highest expenditures as a result of long in-patient hospital stay and repeat follow-up visits, the minister said.

She told the House of Assembly that several initiatives are being implemented to curb the rising cost of overseas medical treatment, adding that the Treatment Abroad policy has been revised and approved by Cabinet and partially implemented.

“Measures are being put in place to apply greater control over referrals so that only those persons who really need treatment get it. We have also established a Treatment Abroad Unit with an increase number of skilled and professional staff to more effectively and efficiently manage the financial, medical and social aspects of treatment abroad. Particular emphasis will be placed on coordination of clinical care patients who are in hospital so as to ensure that their care is provided in a cost effective manner,” she said.

The Health Minister also announced that for the first time nationally, government will be integrating the private doctors in our country with the doctors that are employed in the government service.

“Having benefited from a wide range of advice and consultation, I am convinced that incorporating private doctors doing sessions at the government clinics and our future hospitals alongside our public doctors within a carefully regulated system, will result in the delivery of a better health care system for the people of this country,” she said.