



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **The GHA Announces new Liaison Service for Mental Health Services**

*- Waiting lists for Psychology Services are reduced from 8 weeks to 4 weeks.*

The Gibraltar Health Authority (GHA) has, over the past 18 months, introduced a series of important reforms throughout its Mental Health Services. These reforms serve to further enhance and modernise the GHA services to meet the evolving needs of the community in respect of mental health.

The latest service initiative has been the introduction of a nurse-led liaison service, operating 7 days a week from 08.00 to 20.00. A Nurse Liaison, based at Ocean Views, will now be available to provide assessments, support and reassurance to both service users and their families in times of need. This improved access means that not all services users will need to attend the Accident & Emergency at St Bernard's Hospital. The liaison nurse will also provide advice and support to clinical staff based at St Bernard's Hospital who refer individuals to the appropriate mental health teams, if they require psychiatric or psychological support.

It is important to note that the Nurse Liaisons are both highly qualified charge nurses, experienced in mental health.

The community may recall some of the reforms already implemented in the Mental Health Services, as follows:

- in June 2017, the Mental Health Team implemented the Outreach Service, led by experienced health care professionals, to provide an additional tier of support, available 24/7, to patients in the community and their families in times of need;
- a 2-bedroom apartment, for the purpose of providing supported accommodation, was commissioned by HM Government of Gibraltar in February of 2018. This initiative has facilitated smooth transitional discharges of former inpatients of Ocean Views. These individuals have, since, moved on from the supported flat to complete independence in their own accommodation, receiving weekly visits from the community services;
- Gibraltar's very first dedicated Child and Adolescent Psychology Service (CAHMS) was introduced in January 2019, now referred to as Gibraltar Young Minds (GYM). This

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newly developed service consists of 2 psychologists and a psychiatrist, who treat young persons, providing on-going therapies on both individual basis and within a family unit;

- the average waiting time to see a Psychologist at the GHA was eight weeks in September of 2018, which compares favourably with average waiting times in other European countries, where the target is for 90% of patients referred for psychological therapy to be seen within eighteen weeks. Importantly, the GHA waiting times have since been further reduced, to an average of 6 weeks in January 2018, to 4 weeks at present;
- the recruitment of an additional Consultant Clinical Psychologist in October 2018, was followed by the appointment of a Matron dedicated to mental health services in February 2019;
- since 2017, the Psychiatric team is now resourced with 4 full-time and 1 part-time Consultants; and
- the provision of counselling services has also been significantly enhanced with the Chartered Counselling Psychologist and Counsellor, who are based at the Primary Care Centre, increasing their sessions by an extra day each. Two counsellors, working on a part-time basis, were appointed in April 2019 to add further resilience to the counselling provision.

Minister for Health, Care and Justice, the Honourable Neil F. Costa, added: “I am extremely pleased at the important strides we are taking to improve our mental health services. We are now starting to reap the benefits of over a year of planning. It is very satisfying to witness these tangible improvements, especially, the significant reduction in average waiting times to see a psychologist. The new liaison service will also provide an additional tier of support to persons who need to speak to a mental health professional, without having to attend A&E at St Bernard’s Hospital. We cannot, however, stand still, and we must continue to invest in our services. The GHA will not grow in effectiveness and compassion unless we continue to listen to our patients, their families and the mental health support groups that work so hard to represent their members.

“I wish to sincerely thank my excellent Mental Health teams for their diligent efforts and dedication, as well as their excellent teams, whose contributions and expertise have enabled the successful implementation of these reforms. We continue to work on further improvements, and I very much look forward to make announcements in due course.”