

HURST REPORTS ON CABINET OF Monday February 15 2021

The Cabinet held an emergency meeting today in order to address the rising number of infections that now stress our healthcare systems, and does not appear to be abating. Seven members were present face-to-face, six were on-line and virtual.

1. The Cabinet invited the Director of the Mount St. John Medical Center, the Chief Medical Officer, the Doctor with administrative responsibility for the MSJMC, the Commissioner of Police. Following very vigorous discussions, the Cabinet decided to alter the Regulations governing the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic:

- i. **Curfew Hours are now increased**, compelling all, except essential workers, to be off the streets between **6:00 p.m. to 5:00 am** beginning **Tuesday, February 16, 2021, until March 15, 2021.**
- ii. **Social gatherings are now limited to 5 persons.** Exceptions apply to **Churches and remain at 25 persons; funerals are also limited to 25 persons.**
- iii. **Home Quarantine and Home Isolation will no longer be allowed.** Residents who test positive for Covid-19 will **not** be returned home but are to be sent to a wing of the quarantine hotel set aside for infected persons; persons in the household of the infected resident are to be tested and may be required to quarantine at a government facility, wearing a bracelet.
- iv. **Bracelets will be worn by infected persons** and may be worn by other persons placed in isolation and/or quarantine in order to ensure that no infected person disobeys the confinement rules that apply.

2. The Cabinet was informed (by the Medical Director of the MSJMC) of the human resources available at the MSJMC, including the number of doctors, nurses of varying specialties, and support staff. The Medical Director also informed of the stock of PPEs, providing precise figures of the number of face masks of different types; of face shields, hair coverings and shoe coverings; gloves of various kinds, and other protective gear, now available. Clearly, there is a sufficiency of supply of protective gear at the Hospital and in the Stores. However, there is a clear need for more nurses. The Cabinet enquired of the means by which the specialties can be filled; it is acknowledged that long-term planning is required, or by the importation of additional Cuban nurses and doctors. The Cabinet was informed that 100,000 syringes have been ordered in order to ensure that all persons in Antigua and Barbuda can be successfully vaccinated.

3. The issue of the Dashboard, specifically the lag between publications and the difference between the numbers pending and the increased finding on the next publication, was inquired into by Cabinet. The explanation offered revolved around the flow of information from the MSJMC, which is compelled to examine and test men and women who are travelling. The accumulation of tests carried out during any one night may exceed the “numbers pending” when the Dashboard is

next published. The Cabinet thanked the Minister of Health for his explanation corroborated by the officials from the MSJMC.

4. The arrival of the 5,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine last Friday, February 12, as a gift from Dominica was also discussed. It was agreed that the healthcare workers will be the very first to receive the shots beginning on Wednesday, February 17, 2021. The Police and other front-line workers will also be provided with the vaccine as quickly as possible. The vaccine will also be administered to those who have contracted the disease since it seems to decrease the length of hospital stay, and appears to stop the spread to others. Mention was made of the Head of SAGE of the WHO, a doctor who appeared on a radio program this weekend.

5. The Executive of the Antigua and Barbuda Nurses Association (ABNA) was also invited to Cabinet. The nurses and the MSJMC were asked about the vaccine and the willingness of the Nursing staff to allow the vaccine to be administered. The President of the ABNA would not give a firm endorsement of the acceptance of the vaccine, but would revert to her executive following a meeting on Tuesday, February 16, 2021. Additional issues relating to communication hiccups and supplies of PPEs, the availability of washbasins and hand sanitizers were also raised.