Parliamentary Secretary for Health Joe Cassar has hinted at a radical reform of the primary health care system which would entitle a personal doctor to be chosen by each patient in a network which would blur the lines between private and state care.

Health Minister John Dalli said earlier during the same conference on primary care, being held at the Dolmen Resort, that a consultation document would be launched soon which would propose regional hubs supported by health clinics.

Dr Cassar went further and explained that the regional centres would offer 24-hour walk-in medical care, supporting the primary care providers as well as easing the burden on the Accident and Emergency Department at Mater Dei Hospital. The centres would use an interdisciplinary approach and would offer specialized services, he said.

He noted that most primary care contact takes place with the private sector “by free choice” (Mr Dalli put the figure at 70 per cent) and that the government would respect this and develop the “personal primary care system on this basis”.

“We shall of course ensure that those persons with insufficient means to afford the private family doctor’s fees will receive the necessary financial assistance to ensure that everyone can access the highest quality of care,” he said.

However, when pressed by www.di-ve.com to explain how such a system would work and what the implications were for financing, he declined to comment further, preferring to let the consultation process take its course, only saying that the current system needed to be improved.

At present there is an uneasy hybrid of the private and state-funded systems, especially when it comes to access to services like pathology, for instance. The lack of a nominated doctor for each patient also makes follow-up care much harder – particularly care following inpatient treatment, he explained.