

ROYAL PERTH HOSPITAL — CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR SHUTDOWN

789. Mr R.H. COOK to the Minister for Health:

I refer to yet another document circulated by what must be the middle management at Royal Perth Hospital, outlining the seasonal shutdown and restriction in operating hours of many theatres, clinics and day wards at Royal Perth Hospital over the Christmas and new year period.

- (1) Is it true that the shutdown for 2009-10 will be for a period of four weeks from 18 December 2009 to 18 January 2010?
- (2) Why is the proposed shutdown for 2009-10 double the normal shutdown period of two weeks?
- (3) Will this longer shutdown and restriction on services also apply to other hospital across the state?
- (4) Will the minister guarantee that the proposed closure of many theatres for twice the normal Christmas-new year period will not result in a blow-out in waiting times for elective surgery and other front-line services?

Dr K.D. HAMES replied:

- (1)-(4) I do not know why the member is doing all this when it will be covered again in the matter of public interest later on, but I am happy to use up some of the time. The reality is that the health budget is extremely difficult, and I do not think there has been any secret about that. Every department and every hospital must work within it means.

The reason the health budget is difficult is twofold: there has been growth in demand, while at the same time changes have been made to the way in which hospital procedures occur. One of those changes is that being made to outpatient clinics. The change to the way they operate was initiated under the previous government by the former Minister for Health. Part of this has been extremely successful in improving the efficiency of the management of outpatient clinics. In considering how we can get the best value for money from the hospital, the chief executive officer of Royal Perth Hospital is looking at that as one of the opportunities to best use the dollars he has available. He assured me as recently as last week that the service provided through those outpatient clinics would not suffer through that extended closure period. It has not been concluded yet. It is an option he has put forward that I will look at and I will want to be sure that his arguments to convince me are correct. All our hospitals must look at the best value for money they can get in managing our hospital system.