

HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT WAITING TIMES — FOUR-HOUR RULE

847. Mr W.R. MARMION to the Minister for Health:

Minister, I am proud to be part of a government that is committed to reducing long waiting times in emergency departments in our hospitals. Can the minister please update the house on progress on the implementation of the four-hour rule program?

Dr K.D. HAMES replied:

I thank the member for the question. He is right to be proud, because I have just come from Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital where I was invited by the staff to speak to them about the implementation of the four-hour rule. There were about a hundred staff from that hospital and some from other hospitals there, because they have now reached the implementation phase of the four-hour rule. They have spent the past six months preparing, planning and discussing all of the changes that they need to make. Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, along with Fremantle Hospital, Royal Perth Hospital and Princess Margaret Hospital for Children are joining together in the implementation phase of that four-hour rule.

For those members who do not know, the four-hour rule will mean that for patients going to any of those four hospitals, from the time a patient arrives at the emergency department until the time they are admitted to a ward, discharged and treated or transferred to another hospital, 98 per cent will have to be done within four hours. There is a phasing-in stage, during which the hospitals will get to 75 per cent over about the next 12 months, then 95 per cent and 98 per cent. However, I am strongly of the view that those hospitals can achieve it.

I was really excited today by the enthusiasm of the staff at the hospital. They are excited about this, they are talking about how they can do it, and they are confident that they can achieve it. It must be remembered that it was achieved in the United Kingdom in more than 130 hospitals. In Western Australia, there are different sorts of pressures. We have a growing population and an ageing population, so there are challenges. However, I have great confidence that the staff of all those hospitals can achieve that. The peripheral ring of hospitals, as well as Bunbury Regional Hospital, have just started their planning phase, and, as we progress, we will roll it out throughout Western Australia.

All the other states are extremely interested in the work that we are doing. I have been talking to some of the other state health ministers and to the federal health minister, who are watching with great interest. In fact, they already have teams of people coming over to Western Australia to see what we are planning and how we can do it. It is a tremendous step forward for our hospitals. It will mean that our patients receive far better care, and it will mean that finally the patient will be put first. The journey of the patient through the hospital will be the critical management step for all of the hospital. Therefore, instead of all the focus being on what happens in the emergency department—until now, we have had the worst waiting time in the country, at eight hours, for patients to get a bed—we will move very rapidly over the next 18 months to become the best in the country. Already during the planning phase, we have seen significant improvement as the hospital staff get together and work on things that they can change. They are already making some of those changes, and there has already been a significant improvement in all the parameters by which we judge how well a patient is treated in a hospital.

The member for Nedlands will be very pleased to see how Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital is going. By the way, it just received its renewed accreditation, so I handed over a certificate. The hospital has been through the accreditation process and has passed with flying colours. It is a fantastic hospital in the member's electorate, and he should be proud of it.