

GALLIERS PRIVATE MATERNITY WARD

**792. Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN to the Minister for Health:**

- (1) Will the minister explain why many expectant mothers booked in at Galliers private maternity ward still have not been contacted by the minister's office or by the Armadale Health Service about the continuing operation or otherwise of the facility?
- (2) Does the minister acknowledge that the Department of Health was fully aware at the time of the announcement of the closure of the ward that there were six applicants for the unfulfilled midwifery positions on the wards?
- (3) Will the minister confirm that Health Corporate Network issued instructions, after the jobs were advertised, not to proceed with appointing staff?
- (4) What precisely is the government's commitment to keeping this important facility open?

**Dr K.D. HAMES replied:**

I thank the member for the question.

- (1)-(4) I do not think that this was a happy event for the Department of Health of Western Australia. There is no question that some mistakes were made. I obviously need to accept responsibility for that. Some of the statements the member made are true and some are not accurate. I will go through them to the best of my recollection. Perhaps it is easiest if I tell the story of what happened there. Advertisements were placed in local newspapers to get new staff into the private wing component of the hospital. The member is correct in that there were six applicants. The person who put those advertisements into the local paper then left the employment of the hospital and the applications were left in a drawer. The person senior to that person, who knew that those advertisements had been placed, subsequently also left the hospital. The person in charge of the hospital was not aware that those six applications had been made and had not followed that through. The answer to the Health Corporate Network saying no to those applications is no, it did not know.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** So it did not know?

**Dr K.D. HAMES:** It did not know and it did not give instructions regarding those six people. The government has responsibility to provide for public patients and not private patients, which I will get into in a minute. Nevertheless, those private patients were booked for that hospital and reasonably understood that the service would continue. There were inadequate staff numbers in that section of the hospital and some of the specialist obstetricians had resigned in the previous months. The person in charge of the hospital was of the view that the hospital had not been adequately staffed. He proposed that the private wing of the hospital be shut down and those private patients be moved to the public component of the hospital. He was of the view that they would still be getting the best of care.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** This was an obstetrician who had that view?

**Dr K.D. HAMES:** No, this was the person in charge of the hospital. He was of the view that those patients would still have their own obstetrician carry out their delivery and they would still be able to deliver in the public part of the hospital. Many patients would still have access to a private ward and the extra privileges that private patients are given.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** Can I just get clarity, minister? I just want some clarification.

**Dr K.D. HAMES:** The member should wait until I have finished. While those issues surrounding the potential disclosure were discussed with the doctors looking after the patients, I understand that the final decision had not been made but it was assumed that that was the final position and the patients themselves were not told. That is the situation that I found when I returned to Perth from the Kimberley, where I attended the Kimberley Land Council annual general meeting. During that time, the Premier contacted the health department and the hospital and discussed the issue. Hon Helen Morton, a former administrator of that hospital, examined what happened in that hospital. As a result, a commitment was made to keep it open for at least one month. When I got back and carried out that review, I heard the member for Armadale's comments on the radio about what had occurred. It was my belief that this was unfair and unreasonable. I have made a commitment that the private wing of the hospital, subject to staff being put in place and it being a safe place to operate from, which I am confident will occur, will continue to operate unless a private operator is found for that wing or another private hospital opens in the meantime. That private wing will stay open indefinitely and those patients will be looked after.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** What about the mothers who haven't been contacted?

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY - Tuesday, 13 October 2009]

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Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Dr Kim Hames; Mr Peter Watson

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**Dr K.D. HAMES:** I will refer to the staff first. The six staff members have been contacted. They have been interviewed. I understand that they will be offered positions in that section if that has not already happened. I was advised—I made the comment on radio—that all those women had been contacted. Apparently a letter was ready to go but it had not been ticked off. My next instruction was to contact all those women who had been affected. I do not know about the people the member is referring to who have not been contacted.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** I am saying the mothers haven't been contacted.

**Dr K.D. HAMES:** They are the ones I am talking about. If the member says that they have not been contacted, she should give me their names and I will contact them myself. I guess it depends if it is in that first section immediately affected or the ones who will not be affected at all. How far in advance do we have to tell the mothers? I made a public statement to say that the private wing will stay open. All the doctors have been notified so that during their routine visits, they will make sure that all the patients are aware. I hope there has been sufficient publicity about this and that all those on long-term waiting lists will be informed. We are certainly informing those who will be affected over the next two months. If they are not, the member should give me their names and I will make sure that they are contacted.

This has not been a happy event. The issue is partly to do with why we are managing a private hospital. It goes back to 2004.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** No, it goes back to when you wanted to privatise the entire hospital and Hon Helen Morton came up with this proposal.

**Dr K.D. HAMES:** There was a contract in place for a private operator to manage that wing of the hospital under three conditions. One of those conditions was the establishment and operation of the high dependency unit at that hospital. When the Labor Party came to government, it refused to support that HD unit and was in direct conflict with the contractor. The company took the then government to court to force it to repay that amount. It paid \$12 million upfront for the construction of that hospital on the condition that the then government fulfilled its part of the bargain. The previous government failed to fulfil its part of the bargain and it had to pay \$15 million to get the private sector out of there.

**Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan:** That is right, because the company could not make it work. It was not viable.

*Point of Order*

**Mr P.B. WATSON:** The minister has been answering this question for about six minutes. Is this a ministerial statement or an answer?

**The SPEAKER:** Would the minister conclude his answer.

*Questions without Notice Resumed*

**Dr K.D. HAMES:** I am happy to conclude and wait for the supplementary question.