

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH — INCREASE IN ADMINISTRATION AND CLERICAL STAFF

803. Mr E.S. RIPPER to the Minister for Health:

I ask this question of the Minister for Health in the hope that he, at least, has been briefed on today's news. The Department of Health annual report shows an increase of more than 370 administration and clerical staff across the health system in 2008-09.

- (1) Will the minister confirm that whilst the health budget is requiring service cuts in Western Australian hospitals of up to 10 per cent, he is, at the same time, increasing the number of health bureaucrats in the central office by almost 30 per cent?
- (2) Will the minister provide the people of Western Australia, and perhaps the Treasurer, with an explanation for this extraordinary increase?
- (3) Will the minister now accept that his department's budget is out of his control, and that he has no solution for the department's financial crisis?

Dr K.D. HAMES replied:

- (1)-(3) The quoted figure of 372 additional administration staff in 2008-09 is correct, but it does not reflect the current status, and we are now working hard to reduce that figure. In 2008-09 there was a significant increase in staff across the whole health system. For example, between August of last year and August of this year an additional 700 nurses were employed across the system. Part of that was to cater for the fact that the former Labor government had had significant problems employing nurses into the system, so we had to make up for that deficiency by putting a lot of work into recruiting nurses, and it was very successful.

Beyond that, because the system is working so well, we have also found that people are not leaving the health service, particularly nurses. They used to retire at a rate of about 40 a month; now, only about 10 a month are retiring. There has been a significant reduction in the retirement rate of nurses.

There has been an increase in the number of staff across a whole range of staff throughout the health system and, of course, as we employ more nurses more administrative support is needed. I can tell members that the increase in the employment of nurses has been 40 per cent; the increase in medical support has been 17 per cent. The total health system employs 31 000-plus employees. Out of 31 000-plus employees, with at least 700 additional nurses as well as additional staff in other areas, the administration staff have been increased by only 372. There has been a 17 per cent increase in administration to support a 40 per cent increase in nurses and a 14 per cent increase in doctors.

Mr R.H. Cook interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, member for Kwinana!

Dr K.D. HAMES: That is where we are going to make our cuts and we are going to look at those areas, but as the member stated, this figure was current between 2007-08 and 2008-09, not 2009-10. These are the previous year's figures.