

SIR CHARLES GAIRDNER HOSPITAL — EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

327. Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the response to COVID-19 and the work that continues to happen to ensure that hospitals are prepared for any increased demand. Can the minister outline to the house how the expansion of the emergency department at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital will further help our hospital workers manage any increase in cases of highly infectious diseases, particularly during the upcoming flu season?

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

I thank the member for the question. Health is an important issue in the electorate of Bicton, and I acknowledge the great work that the member has done with her community to raise health issues.

I had the great opportunity to go to Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital this morning to meet with the doctors and nurses who are working on the front line in our emergency department. I was there to open the five-bed fast-track area and isolation room at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital as part of an expansion that was originally prioritised for the COVID-19 response. Charles is a world-leading medical facility, and these expanded areas are expected to help the emergency department staff with the patient flow of the 6 000 presentations they have each month. The \$900 000 expanded capacity area will fast-track those patients with low acuity injuries and illnesses, such as those in categories 4 and 5. It will provide them with the opportunity to get assistance quickly so that they can move through and out of the ED and get on with their lives. It will take around 20 per cent of patients away from the main ED environment, which will be an important contribution to patient flow. Patients will be able to be seen without entering the main emergency department, which is a loud and busy place. This will keep the bays in the emergency department free for more complex patients.

This upgrade was fast-tracked to make sure that we were ready for COVID-19, but we will now be ready for the 2020 flu season. Part of this facility is an isolation room that can accommodate up to three patients at any one time. That will ensure that patients who come into the ED who are exhibiting infectious-like diseases can be accommodated in a more appropriate environment. Charles is one of our specialist infectious diseases hospitals. During the Ebola outbreak, it received between nine and a dozen patients. Its staff are qualified and are experts in the area. This new facility will go a long way towards building on that expertise and specialisation to make sure that they are well equipped to deal with any issues that come their way.

The negative pressure room will enable suspected infectious patients to be assessed and treated in a controlled clinical environment. It is about putting patients first, which is always the priority of the McGowan government. While I am talking about putting patients first, I remind everyone to go to their general practitioner to get their flu jab. The campaign I recently launched with the WA Primary Health Alliance called #SeeYourGP is a reminder to people, particularly those over 65 years of age, to make sure that they get their immunisation or flu jab for this year. Of course, the McGowan government continues to lead the nation in flu vaccination programs, with all primary school-aged children now eligible for a free flu jab. Although the flu jab will not protect against coronavirus, it will protect people who are more susceptible to falling ill to the flu and may need care in our hospitals.

This latest upgrade is another important element of making sure that our hospitals are ready to receive patients and put patients first, which is the McGowan government's priority.