

NURSES, EMPLOYMENT

460. Mr BIRNEY to the Minister for Health:

I refer the minister to statements by a Department of Health executive general manager that the Government's commitment to employ an additional 400 nurses over four years is unrealistic given the current labour market conditions.

- (1) Is the minister aware that regional health services are forced to use agency nurses to address the current critical nursing shortage, forcing costs up by over 30 per cent?
- (2) When will the minister admit that this Government has failed to address this shortage, and take real steps towards a long-term solution?

Mr KUCERA replied:

- (1)-(2) As Minister for Health, I have never denied that problems and shortages exist in the health system, particularly with nurses. There is a worldwide shortage of nurses. The use of agency nurses at Kalgoorlie Regional Hospital is very limited, but it is one of the reasons for pressures on that hospital. The Government is aware of the issues with nurses. It has put some \$300 million this year into the new enterprise bargaining agreement with nurses. I am pleased to see that all this year's nursing teaching programs are full. I have said on a number of occasions in this House that I realise and acknowledge that there are problems and shortages in the health system. That is why we were so pleased to push forward that legislation on the weekend, which will truly recognise the work of our nurses and put them in a position in which they are recognised for the job they do and the training they must undertake.