

NURSES, WAGE PARITY

301. Dr J.M. WOOLLARD to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the severe shortage of public hospital nurses and to the increased reliance on casual and agency nurses and personal care assistants.

- (1) With the increased lack of parity that exists between public hospital nurses, casual nurses and agency nurses, approximately how much has the Government paid to agencies over the past year to obtain nursing staff at the three tertiary hospitals?
- (2) Why has the minister decreased the payments to casual nurses so that they are now denied the 20 per cent loading on penalty rates?
- (3) In view of the increased use of carers in the health service, will the minister support the inclusion of carers in the provisions of the Nurses Board of Western Australia?

Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:

- (1)-(3) At this stage I will not support the inclusion of carers in the provisions of the Nurses Board because at this stage they do not fall within that area. They are not equipped or trained to be considered to be nurses. As I understand it, there has been no move in the industry for that to occur. There may have been some moves on demarcation issues that affect federations or unions, but as far as I am aware, it is not the case in the industry. I am not aware of any decrease in payments. I am more than happy to take that part of the question on notice if there is a specific issue about nurses that the member wishes to raise. A 13.5 per cent increase was rightly awarded to nurses this year, and I would be very surprised if there has been any decrease in payments in the public sector. I am more than happy to take on notice the question on the total amount of money spent on agency nurses. I am concerned about the amount of money that we spend generally on agency nurses. However, there is only one way to overcome that, and that is by recruiting and attracting more nurses back into the profession and by making sure that the number of places in our universities are sufficient to support them. I will be more than happy to table the discussion paper on family friendly initiatives that was prepared by Helen Creed from the Australian Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Unions on behalf of the nursing profession. It is an excellent template that I am happy to place before all the hospitals in this State. It has not officially been made available yet, but I am more than happy to make it available to members of the House. The document provides an excellent template for assisting in putting the kind of flexibility that the member for Murdoch talked about back into the workplace.

[See paper No 475.]

Mr R.C. KUCERA: This Government did not head down the path of privatisation. It did not wreck the community and hospitals. As we move towards a fully flexible nursing work force, support nurses and give them the priority, recognition and value they deserve, we will be able to set up the kinds of casual pools of nurses in our hospitals that will allow me as a minister to say that there are no more agency nurses in our hospitals.