

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH — COMMUNITY SERVICE LEAVE PROGRAM

500. Mr I.M. BRITZA to the Minister for Health:

I understand that about two years ago the Minister for Health launched a community service leave program for the Department of Health. Can the minister please update the house on the uptake of this program and its benefits in providing charitable community services?

Dr K.D. HAMES replied:

I thought I would get to inform my side of what we have done as well! This is a fantastic program, and one of which I am very proud. We started this a couple of years ago and it is called a community service leave option. All medical staff working within the Department of Health, including doctors, nurses, physiotherapists and occupational therapists, who are able to provide a medical health-related service to patients who require it, are able to access community service leave. I based the program on something that I used to do in the old days, which was Army Reserves. As a medical employee at the time, I was able to take two weeks paid leave from the health department to do Army Reserve work. We modelled this scheme along the same lines. It allows our health workers to provide aid to help the health needs of other countries. The countries where some of our staff have gone include Cambodia, South Africa, China, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Nepal, Philippines, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Thailand, Vietnam and Timor. We have a fantastic program in Tanzania where our midwives assist in training people in midwifery. In 2011–12, there were 36 applicants for the community service leave program and in 2012–13 that number increased to 53. It costs us about only \$2 500 for each person to go, or \$150 000 in total. That amount largely funds air fares and, of course, the participants are paid their leave entitlements while they are gone. I hope this program will expand considerably. We hope to get 100 applicants next year. I encourage health department staff to do international aid work. Not only does it strengthen our relationship internationally, but also it is great for our workers. They experience the very poor conditions in Tanzania, for example, compared with the conditions in Western Australia. People are able to come back with a better perspective on life and on management, a better appreciation of the quality of service that they provide and a much better relationship with the patients. It has been a fantastic program and I hope that it will continue to grow.