

RURAL HEALTH SERVICES, FUNDING CUTS

**348. Mr BOARD to the Minister for Health:**

I refer the minister to the unequivocal statement he made in this House on 28 August this year when he said, "I can assure the House that health funding for rural health services will not be slashed; it will be increased."

- (1) Can the minister confirm statements made in the House today by the Rural Doctors Association of Western Australia that rural health services have been told to slash between \$20 million and \$25 million from their budgets?
- (2) Did the minister mislead the House on 28 August?

**Mr KUCERA replied:**

- (1) I thank the member for Murdoch for his question. I have said repeatedly that the health budget will be increased in this year's budget. Any statement to the contrary is mere speculation, regardless of who makes it. Most rural hospitals met their budgets last year. In fact, the Government was able to draw surpluses back from some country hospitals. Country problems are not about budgets, but about costs and the shortage of nurses and doctors. Rather than alarming people by making unsubstantiated statements that are mere speculation, all people in those areas should be working with some of the excellent rural health managers to assist with costs and to help provide the level of service that is expected from them this year. This year will be my first opportunity to see how country managers manage their costs and their hospitals. As with city hospitals, they will be expected to manage properly. There is a shortage of nurses and doctors. That is a difficulty for many smaller hospitals. The Government is working towards a solution. As the Premier has already announced, the budget results will be revealed tomorrow. Some of those people who have been vociferous about the so-called cuts may get some egg on their faces.
- (2) No.