

DENTAL HEALTH CARE, SENIORS

**39. Mr M.F. BOARD to the Minister for Health:**

I refer the minister to statements made by the member for Perth when launching Dental Awareness Week. I acknowledge that these were very fine statements. The member stated that regular dental visits are essential, because many older Australians have high quality and expensive prostheses that require high levels of oral hygiene and regular maintenance.

- (1) Is the minister aware that in 2001-02, the metropolitan dental subsidy scheme subsidised the treatment of 200 pensioners and health card holders daily?
- (2) Is the minister also aware that if these people were to revert to the government scheme, they would wait approximately 18 months for their treatment rather than the five or six weeks that is currently the case?
- (3) Does the minister support quicker and cheaper dental treatment for our elderly?
- (4) If so, why has the Government now limited this subsidy scheme, as from 23 August, to emergency treatment only?

**Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:**

- (1)-(4) I acknowledge that elderly people have an issue with dental health in this State. That is precisely why the Government is opening the new dental hospital. I acknowledge the input of the member for Darling Range into that project. Virtually all the existing clinics are also being expanded. The new clinic was opened in Warwick just three weeks ago. I thank the member for Girrawheen for attending that opening. New clinics will be coming on-stream at Embleton, in the southern region at Willagee or Coolbellup, and other places in the southern corridor.

Several members interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I point out to the member for Murdoch that the money we were giving in subsidies to private operators until the completion of the recent clinic refurbishments and the opening of new clinics is now being transferred to those clinics. Public money will be used in public facilities; it is as simple as that. A number of dentists were making a fair bit of money out of the public system because of a lack of planning. When we did the changeover to the new clinic -

Several members interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I remind the member for Darling Range of my statements in this House earlier this year. When I asked the staff at the new dental clinic what we should do with the old clinic they said, "We will just keep it open as well." What wonderful planning!

This Government has withdrawn some subsidy funding from private dentists for use in public clinics, which have been built and opened by this Government to provide a better service for all Western Australians.