

NURSES, PROVISION OF FITPACKS

**473. Mr WALDRON to the Minister for Health:**

Regarding the release of an operational circular concerning the provision of sterile needles and syringes from rural and regional hospitals to people who inject drugs, I ask -

- (1) Is there a concern for the safety and security of nurses who take part in the program by providing Fitpacks?
- (2) If so, what security measures are in place to protect nursing and other hospital staff in a situation where their personal safety is threatened?

**Mr KUCERA replied:**

I thank the member for some notice of this question.

- (1) This is an important issue. The operational circular referred to requires that all public rural hospitals that provide after-hours emergency service should provide access to clean injecting equipment by way of Fitpacks. As we know, unfortunately the issue of drug use has pushed out into virtually all parts of our State. There is good evidence that people who live in rural areas and who inject drugs have difficulty accessing this kind of equipment, so it is important that it is made available. Currently about 50 regional hospitals are already providing access to clean needles and syringes as Fitpacks. The operational circular requires that the 30 regional hospitals which are not yet licensed to distribute Fitpacks review their operations and commence providing this service.
- (2) Of course this is of concern. Safety and security is paramount. This is being taken care of by accredited training in the rationale for those needle and syringe programs and in best practice service provision. This is available to coordinators of all regional needle and syringe programs. This training also includes how to deal with difficult patients and abusive clients, and that clients should not be kept waiting unnecessarily. An additional day for developing training skills - train the trainer - is also available to coordinators so that they in turn train staff within their own hospitals.

Mr Waldron: It is pretty hard in very small hospitals.

Mr KUCERA: Yes, it is. The circular did advise that hospital staff can contact staff within the department. This is probably more important for physical security. Funding is also available for hospitals to fund simple measures which increase staff safety and security, such as the installation of chutes, lighting and intercom systems. This is available to the hospitals, and we would ask the hospitals to make sure that those things are put in place because many of the smaller hospitals have only nursing staff on duty at night.

The implementation of the needle and syringe program provision within health services is the responsibility of the health service itself. There is a perception by local health services that they have a difficulty with security. This was raised recently about smaller hospitals when I was in the great southern and in the south west, and I told them that it is imperative for them as health service managers to raise this issue and make sure this provision is in place. The same issue was raised with me in the children's ward at Kalgoorlie Regional Hospital, and from my past experience in another life it is not difficult to look at security issues anyway. At the end of the day, it is the responsibility of the health services to make sure that their staff are protected.