

MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY 2004-07

49. Mr A.P. O'GORMAN to the Minister for Health:

A key issue of the mental health strategy 2004-07 was to expand mental health services in hospital emergency departments. Will the minister detail the progress of this initiative and outline what other steps have been taken to improve mental health services across the state?

Mr J.A. McGINTY replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question.

Additional specialist mental health teams of mental health nurses and psychiatrists have already started in metropolitan hospital emergency departments to provide around-the-clock assistance to people with mental health problems. Nineteen mental health liaison nurses have now been appointed: three at Joondalup Health Campus, five at Royal Perth Hospital, five at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, two at Fremantle Hospital and another four will start next month, three at Bentley and one at Armadale. Four additional mental health liaison nurses have been employed to start at Rockingham-Kwinana District Hospital and at Swan District Hospital within the next six months. That will create a total of 31 additional mental health nurses working in the emergency departments of our hospitals.

As members will appreciate, these nurses provide for a much quicker response for patients and free up general medical and nursing staff, who previously had to manage mental health patients as well as other trauma patients at emergency departments.

The role of psychiatric registrars at the Swan District, Sir Charles Gairdner and Royal Perth Hospitals has also been expanded to provide the emergency departments with 24-hour, seven-day-a-week psychiatric assessment, treatment and support. This service has also been expanded to the Armadale-Kelmscott Memorial Hospital.

Late last year a major international recruitment drive for mental health professionals was conducted, mainly in the United Kingdom. Local advertising aimed at recruiting more mental health professionals to public hospitals concluded last week. A pool of 149 mental health professionals is now in Western Australia from which we can select. A further 60 have expressed an interest in working in Western Australia.

During the election campaign, the Australian Labor Party promised that 800 more nurses would be employed during this term of government. Just one month after the election, that recruitment is well under way. These appointments form part of the Labor government's \$173 million package to boost mental health services across Western Australia over the next three years.

In addition to the employment of those additional nurses, capital works are under way. Construction of a five-bed mental health observation unit at the Royal Perth Hospital emergency department will add to the capacity of that department. It is due for completion at the end of June 2005. The five-bed observation unit planned for Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital is likely to be transferred to the Joondalup Health Campus to add to the capacity of its emergency department to treat mental health patients. Construction of a five-bed observation unit for mental health patients at the Fremantle Hospital emergency department is due to begin shortly. All these efforts will add to the initiatives already undertaken to enable our staff in emergency departments to complete the work they are doing, particularly during peak periods.