

BUNBURY REGIONAL HOSPITAL, BUDGETARY CRISIS

759. Mr BOARD to the Minister for Health:

I refer the minister to his statement in this House on 28 August 2001 that the Government “will provide more money for health and greater support for regional health services”. Is the minister aware of the budgetary crisis at Bunbury Regional Hospital in which, due to budgetary restraints -

- (a) the acute services division is unable to purchase a replacement electrocardiograph machine costing only \$7 000, which is putting operations in jeopardy; and
- (b) in order to curtail expenses, all day surgery, including those cases that do not require in-patient beds or operating theatres, has been cancelled over the Easter break?

Mr KUCERA replied:

I am not aware of the specific issues raised by the member for Murdoch. It is common practice for all major hospitals to not book surgery over Easter and Christmas because the hard-working staff in major hospitals want to go on holiday with their families at the same time as everyone else. It is something that is done by all hospitals; it is not about budgets. I will not go back through all the budgets and all the issues of this year. An enormous amount of money has been spent. A lot has been made by the member for Murdoch about the money received for AlintaGas. According to him, enough money has been received to float all the balloonists at Northam every Sunday morning. He started casting aspersions about money that was allocated for a magnetic resonance imaging machine at Fremantle Hospital. As with Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, the money is in the budget for the MRI machine at Fremantle Hospital. It was anticipated last year when the Blandford report stated that there had to be another machine in this State during the period of this Government. There was no mention of this Government’s saying that it would pay for a machine at Fremantle Hospital. The Opposition, like the Government, waited for the issue of the licence. Will the member for Murdoch now run a petition for a licence to be given to Fremantle Hospital? Is that the priority he sets for the federal Government? The money is in the budget. Unlike the mob on the other side of the House, we expect the federal Government to live up to its responsibilities. Money is in the budget for these machines and for rural hospitals.

Mr Board: What about Bunbury?

Mr KUCERA: There is money for Bunbury. It is interesting that another private MRI machine was put into Bunbury in the expectation of a licence. The Blandford report stated that a licence was required in the south west of the State. What happened? We have been told to wait until at least the end of this month, when an independent inquiry on budgetary issues affecting these machines will be held. How independent will that inquiry be? The last time that independent group said which hospital should get a licence, Dr Wooldridge, the federal minister, overrode it in the same way as he overrode the funding for asthma programs by taking \$5 million from them. The member has the gall to ask me about issues affecting Bunbury! He should face up to his responsibilities and run a petition for a machine at Fremantle Hospital or sign the petition for our children to have a machine at Princess Margaret Hospital for Children.