

MEDICAL SERVICES IN MERREDIN

223. Mr B.J. GRYLLS to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the Merredin doctor crisis highlighted by the fact that the community has had 20 doctors over the past two years, and to the minister's comments this morning outlining the State Government's strategy to contract private practitioners to work in state hospitals.

- (1) What is the State Government's strategy to ensure doctors are available in state hospitals in a situation in which no private practitioners are available?
- (2) Given that there is clearly a problem retaining doctors in Merredin, will the minister please explain his apparent reasoning that no action is required by the State Government?
- (3) Since federal and state negotiations - which I am committing to assist the minister with - may not bring a speedy resolution to these funding issues, what direct action will the minister take to address the immediate and urgent problem in Merredin?

Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:

While I am on my feet, I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of four of our emergency nurses from Royal Perth Hospital who did such a magnificent job last week.

[Applause.]

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I thank the member for his question.

- (1)-(3) I had a productive meeting with four people from the Shire of Merredin this morning. I thank them for coming here to express their views. Dr Pearn-Rowe this morning announced to the ABC that the Australian Medical Association had been able to replace the current general practitioner, who is due to leave tomorrow. There was community concern about that earlier this week. I understand that is a temporary placement, but we will work towards a long-term solution. I answered the last part of the member's question this morning - it is in *Hansard* - and I have given undertakings to the shire on the other issues. I am working towards a short-term solution, and medium and long-term solutions.

The other thing that Dr Pearn-Rowe said today - he and I do not always see eye to eye, but on this occasion we did - was that in Australia the problem lies fairly and squarely at the feet of successive Commonwealth Governments. It is as simple as that.