

“NATIONAL REVIEW OF NURSING EDUCATION 2002”

121. Mr M.F. BOARD to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the report titled “National Review of Nursing Education 2002”, which was released yesterday.

- (1) In view of the fact that the shortage of nurses in Western Australia is such a critical issue, why did the Western Australian Department of Health fail to make a submission to this important national review?
- (2) What specific recommendations will the minister support and immediately implement?

Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:

I thank the member for his question.

- (1)-(2) The retention of members of the nursing profession is an important issue, and it is one of the key issues on which this Government is currently working. The Government was well aware of the national review and took part in the review process, as did all States.

Mr M.F. Board: You did not make a submission though.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: We took part in the review; it is as simple as that. I have some important figures with me, because I was a little confused by the media report this morning that Western Australia was worse off than other States. I also include in that a program that the previous Government put in place and about which the member for Darling Range will be aware. I have had a preliminary look at the 283-page report and have been unable to find the specific negative references mentioned in the media this morning. The fact is that the average growth rate for the employment of nursing workers in Australia is 0.8 per cent. The rate in Western Australia is slightly higher than the national average; the highest growth rate was reported in Queensland. The rate in New South Wales is 1.1 per cent. I will relate a couple of important points, and will quickly go through some specific figures. The report shows that Western Australia has a nursing employment growth rate of 0.9 per cent, which is slightly better than the national average. The ratio of nurses to every 100 000 people has steadily declined since the 1980s. However, this ratio has remained stable in Western Australia over the past five years, so nurses are being retained in Western Australia at a better rate than in other States. That is not to say that we still do not have a problem.

Western Australia relies on graduate nurses from other States because the Commonwealth Government needs to allocate more tertiary nursing places. The report recommends 400 additional tertiary nursing places in this State. I urge the member for Murdoch to talk to members of his party.

Mr M.F. Board: Do you support those recommendations?

Mr R.C. KUCERA: A particular problem for both Western Australia and New South Wales is skills shortages. The report recommends a major investment in the retention of the existing work force, the recruitment of nurses not currently employed and the recruitment of nurses from overseas. In addition, a series of strategies is also recommended. Of course I support the recommendations if it means that Western Australia will get extra nurses. I need to point out to the member for Murdoch that a strategy is in place in this State, unlike other places. A \$289 million enterprise bargaining agreement was negotiated this year. The state secretary of the Australian Nursing Federation described the EBA only last week as the best deal for Western Australian nurses. Western Australia also has a \$16.4 million Nurse-Link campaign, free refresher and reregistration courses, a major advertising campaign, and a nurse exchange program with the United Kingdom and Ireland. These are in addition to the kinds of things outlined in the report. In this year alone, a further 124 nurses went through renewal of registration courses in Western Australia. Over the past year, the number of full-time nurses working in the public system has increased by 325. The Government will work towards supporting those recommendations. This Government now has a strong strategy in place for nurse recruitment and retention. We are going forward.

The SPEAKER: Before I give the call to the member for Murdoch to ask a supplementary question, I acknowledge the presence in the Speaker's gallery of Dr Keith Norrish, who tonight will be awarded an honorary doctorate in science from the University of Western Australia.