

HOSPITALS, EFFECTIVENESS OF WINTER STRATEGIES

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

With winter officially ending tomorrow, will the minister update the house on the effectiveness of the winter strategies implemented by the Gallop government to cope with the increased demand in public hospitals?

Mr J.A. McGINTY replied:

Earlier this year I announced the government's strategy to cope with the increased demand in Perth's emergency departments this winter. At the time it was hard to foresee how cold and wet some parts of this winter would be. Perth set new records for the wettest June since 1968 and the coldest daily maximum in June since 1966. Consequently, there has been a sharp increase in flu activity this year with official notifications as of today showing 351 cases compared with 37 cases at the same time last year. The government allocated \$39 million to open 221 additional beds. So far this winter, 166 of the beds have been opened with the use of the remaining beds to be dependent on demand and the availability of nurses to open the beds. There has not been a demand for all 221 beds as the length of stay in the major hospitals has reduced and staff are making better use of existing beds with 16.3 admissions for each bed this year compared with 15 admissions for each bed in 2004.

Other recent initiatives include specialist care teams in emergency departments, additional junior medical staff at general and suburban hospitals, ward-based discharge coordinators, Sunday discharges for patients and the expansion of the state government's rehabilitation and nursing-in-the-home program.

The government's strategy to reduce the pressure on Perth's major hospitals is paying dividends with diversion hours in 2005 down by approximately 55 per cent. Between January and 29 August this year, Perth's major hospitals have spent a total of 343 hours on ambulance diversion with only two triple diversions in eight months. In the same eight months last year, hospitals spent 766 hours on diversion with 27 triple diversions. This is despite a 12 per cent increase in emergency department activity between May and August this year compared with the same period in 2004. Last year, 68 856 people presented themselves to emergency departments during the period compared with 77 216 people in 2005. That has resulted in a 12 per cent growth in emergency admissions from 21 871 patients to 24 473 patients, and a seven per cent growth in unplanned overnight admissions from 22 879 patients to 24 495 patients.

With these significant matters almost behind us and with winter finishing tomorrow - although there will still be pressure on our emergency departments - I take this opportunity to congratulate all staff in the emergency departments who have worked so hard over the winter months.