

COUNTRY HEALTH BOARDS, ABOLITION

896. Mr GRYLLS to the Minister for Health:

With reference to the minister's decision to abolish country health boards and given that there are a large number of committed community members on these boards who want to have input into decisions about country health, I ask -

- (1) When will country health board members be advised of their role, and what will be their role?
- (2) Will the entities have access to country health budgets?
- (3) Will they have a decision-making role in resource and staff allocation for country health services?

Mr KUCERA replied:

I thank the member for this question of which I had some notice just before question time.

- (1) I reaffirm that it is the Government's view that there must be a change in the way the business of health is conducted in the country, and there must be a shift to professional management of health services generally.

Mr Day: Are you saying they are not professional now?

Mr KUCERA: If the member for Darling Range listened, he would find out that I am following the model that he set up in the upper great southern for the amalgamation of health services generally. There is a move towards making sure that well-meaning and tremendous country health board members are not saddled with the enormous burden that now falls upon most country hospitals and the huge amounts of money it takes to run those premises. It is more important that country people have input into the quality and kinds of services they need for their country towns and are given the opportunity to form into major lobby groups within footprints and areas of health to ensure those kinds of services continue.

I put this to the member for Merredin: it is more important that people be clearly informed and have input into their services without having to carry the burden that is already there. I have been to Merredin twice in the immediate past. I was there last week when I spoke at length to people there. I have heard from other health services. I have a letter from Berit Young, the Chairperson of Geraldton Health Service. She was clearly impressed by what we said and the way in which we intend to move forward.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Omodei: Geraldton is not Merredin.

The SPEAKER: Order, member for Warren-Blackwood!

Mr KUCERA: The letter reads -

Dear Minister

We wish to commend you on your vision for a new order to be introduced for the operation of country health services, and to express our appreciation for the visit of Chris O'Farrell to give us a broad outline of your concept.

We offer our unequivocal support to your proposal, subject to a model which protects the input and interests of country communities being finally determined.

She is quite right about that.

Mr Trenorden interjected.

Mr KUCERA: The member for Avon should listen to this, because misinformation has been put about by a person whom a very eminent doctor described in *The West Australian* as asinine. That is a very apt description. The letter continues -

We are in total agreement that the present system is overdue for complete overhaul, and we also endorse your view that there is a much more effective and efficient method in which services of optimum standard can be delivered to all residents of Western Australia.

- (2) Through the normal process of dealing with hospitals, of course entities will have access to country health budgets. However, they will not be managing issues on a day-to-day basis. That is not needed

now we have the input of a single unified health system that will allow them to operate properly and professionally.

- (3) The entities should not have a decision-making role in resource and staff allocation or in employing people. We intend to ensure that is not the case. However, it is important that they have a clear, informed input into service delivery.