

MAGNETIC RESONANCE IMAGING TECHNOLOGY

**231. Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO to the Minister for Health:**

Will the minister advise on the progress being made to ensure that Western Australians have access to magnetic resonance imaging technology, and provide an update on the provision of MRI services in Western Australia generally?

**Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:**

I appreciate the notice the member has given me of this fairly complicated question. I announced on Saturday that the structural modifications needed for the MRI machine to be installed at Princess Margaret Hospital for Children will begin in January. The PMH MRI should be fully operational by March or April of next year. The State Government will spend \$11 million purchasing an MRI for PMH as well as replacements for the ageing scanners at Royal Perth Hospital and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, for which incidentally no procurement planning was made. Money to purchase a scanner for Fremantle Hospital, which is contingent upon the granting of a Medicare licence to offset its operating costs, has also been quarantined. Should we receive licensing arrangements for it prior to the allotted time, obviously the Government will consider that during the current process.

The State Government has already clearly outlined and demonstrated how the Commonwealth Government's inept handling and management of the issuing of these licences has favoured the private health system over the public health system. The Government has conducted some further research into that and uncovered just how much that inequitable distribution of services has grown. While MRI machines were confined to the public hospital system, the cost growth of MRI services was very modest. However, as this chart shows, with the extension of MRI machines into the private sector from 1998 onwards there has been an enormous cost growth. The red line on the graph clearly shows the annual commonwealth funding for public MRI machines. We use these charts to try to get the Leader of the Opposition to understand the issues involved. During the same period the Commonwealth's annual funding for public MRI machines has risen by only \$100 000, and its funding for private MRI machines to assess sports injuries and the like - not kids' injuries - has exploded from zero to more than \$10 million. During the same period four Medicare licences were issued to the private sector; and not one single licence was issued to our public hospitals.

The two Western Australian public teaching hospitals, PMH and Fremantle Hospital, have been denied commonwealth Medicare licences. Our children's hospital is still being denied a licence. We are yet to hear from the federal Minister for Health and Ageing about the next allocation of Medicare licences. I mentioned it to her staff yesterday, and their attitude was that they did not want to know. We will not forget that we were told by the federal health minister earlier this year that she would look at these issues. A letter was sent to a concerned parent in April this year. It states -

The MEG -

The monitoring and evaluation group that the minister puts together -

is continuing to monitor patient access and utilisation and will make recommendations to the Federal Government regarding the need for further Medicare eligible MRI services in Western Australia later this year.

It is now almost November, and we still have not heard a peep. I call on the federal health minister to make an announcement. Her staff said yesterday, and she has said to the Press in this State, that she has received the recommendations of that group but she will choose when she wants to release them. I remind her that while she is waiting, we are putting an MRI machine in our kids' hospital.