

HOSPITALS, USE OF PERSONAL CARE ASSISTANTS

**163. Dr J.M. WOOLLARD to the Minister for Health:**

In some of our public hospitals where it is difficult to find registered and enrolled nurses, the positions are being replaced by personal care assistants.

- (1) What action will the Government take to prevent the current practice in some public sector hospitals of PCAs doing the work of registered and enrolled nurses?
- (2) Will the Government close beds on wards in which the number of qualified nurses who are working is fewer than the minimum benchmarks of the full bench workload order; that is, where there is a sustained unreasonable workload for nurses?

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

- (1) I am very pleased that the member for Alfred Cove has highlighted the need to work towards a teamwork approach to nursing and health in this State. Obviously during the considerable debate yesterday, which had good input from both sides, the member for Alfred Cove was not listening to the comments about the teamwork approach to solving the problems surrounding the nursing work force. That issue was raised in the report, of which I still have a copy and on which I will concentrate when I meet the other Australian health ministers in November.
- (2) Of course we do not want to close hospital beds. As the member for Murdoch said yesterday, it is not sensible to close beds in those hospitals as a result of an industrial ruling. The approach is to sit around the table with all the people concerned to ensure that people get their health services in this State. If the member for Alfred Cove wants to use that as a cudgel, that is entirely up to her. At the end of the day, we will work with all parties concerned to ensure our nurses are supported and that our PCAs are used to support nurses.

As for the member for Alfred Cove's allegations that PCAs are being used in place of nurses, she knows that that is not the case, it is a scurrilous allegation and it cannot be proved because it is not occurring. At the end of the day, we will use nursing work forces to get the best services in this State in accordance with an excellent review and report. It is up to all parties concerned - the unions, the federations, the hospitals and Government - to work together on this issue. Notwithstanding that, the member may not have noticed that there is a nursing shortage.