

MAGNETIC RESONANCE IMAGING MACHINE, PMH HOSPITAL FOR CHILDREN

762. Mr BOARD to the Minister for Health:

The minister wants to talk about magnetic resonance imaging machines, so the Opposition will ask some questions about them. I refer to the minister's refusal to purchase an MRI machine for Princess Margaret Hospital for Children.

- (1) Will the minister confirm that the previous Government allocated approximately \$2 million towards the purchase and installation of an MRI machine, without the requirement for a Medicare licence?
- (2) Will the minister confirm today that the Women's and Children's Hospital, Adelaide, similar to eastern States' hospitals, has committed to fund an MRI machine without a Medicare licence?
- (3) Will the minister come clean and tell the Western Australian community that the cost of in-patient MRI machines is the sole responsibility of the State?
- (4) Why has the minister refused to spend around \$400 000 of the \$597 million granted this year by the Commonwealth to health in Western Australia on the running costs of the machine for those sick kids about whom he talks?

Mr KUCERA replied:

- (1)-(4) I really thank the member for Murdoch for this question, because it gives me an opportunity to clarify some of the nonsense and misinformation that is being put out by the other side of the House. It will also show clearly how those opposite do not support the children of this State, but are quite happy to support big business.

I will deal with the first part of the question. Money was allotted for an MRI machine at Fremantle Hospital, and in fact it is still in the budget.

Mr Board: Why don't you spend it and use it?

The SPEAKER: Member for Murdoch, the minister is endeavouring to answer your question. Every time he starts, you interject. Because you asked the question I will give you some leeway, but it has got to a point at which you must desist.

Mr KUCERA: Money was allotted for a machine at Fremantle Hospital. As I said in my previous answer, money is already in the budget for an MRI machine at Fremantle Hospital. I have discussed the issues with the people at Fremantle Hospital and with the Department of Health. The money was allotted to that hospital because it was anticipated that a Medicare licence would be awarded as a result of the recommendations in the Blandford report.

Mr Board: No, it wasn't.

Mr KUCERA: I am going on the advice that I have been given by the Department of Health and those people who have spoken to me about this issue. Money has been allotted to the Fremantle Hospital. However, this is about a Medicare licence. If the member for Murdoch wants to take up the cudgels for Fremantle Hospital and run a petition against his parliamentary colleagues in the east, I would be more than happy to accommodate him. In fact, I have the forms here now. I would be more than happy to give to the member for Murdoch a copy of the form for Princess Margaret Hospital for Children as well.

I will move on and talk about Adelaide. The Women's and Children's Hospital, Adelaide was in exactly the same position as the Princess Margaret Hospital for Children. Adelaide's children's hospital was struggling because it was not even given an indication that there would be an additional licence. However, as is the situation in Western Australia, I am advised that the vast majority of the machines in South Australia go to the private sector; they do not go to children's hospitals. South Australia has been put in exactly the same position as Western Australia.

This morning I heard one of the elected senators for the Liberal Party running the same nonsense line as the member for Murdoch; that is, why do I not take the money out of a certain area. From where do I take the money out of Princess Margaret Hospital? Do I take it out of the new heart unit that was put in place this year, or out of the oncology department; or do I go down the road, cap in hand, to one of the private operators and ask it to come into our hospital and pay the money to us, and stop fixing football injuries and fix our kids? Should I go down the road and do that?

Mr Board: You are misleading the House.

Mr KUCERA: I am not misleading the House, member for Murdoch.

The member wanted to talk about in-patients. In the newspaper this morning, one of the oncology specialists is reported to have stated clearly that only 30 per cent of the children who go through Princess Margaret Hospital would be admitted as in-patients. I have figures. If the member for Murdoch wishes me to table figures, I would be delighted to do so.

I will quickly return to what I was saying because I realise this is question time. The issue with Princess Margaret Hospital is that only 30 per cent of the children would ever be admitted as in-patients.

Mr Board: That is not correct.

Mr KUCERA: Again, the member for Murdoch is arguing against his State and its children. I cannot believe this. I would be very pleased to circulate the member for Murdoch's comments, together with my answers, to everybody in his electorate who has a child.

We have talked about the cost of \$400 000. Thirty per cent of the children would be in-patients. I am advised by the oncologists that the other 70 per cent of the children who would use that machine would be outpatients. That appeared in the newspaper this morning, and we all believe what we read in *The West Australian* - those opposite quote it all the time. The other matter is that those long-suffering women who use King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women and who do not have access to an MRI machine at the moment would also get access to the same machine.

The bottom line is that we have already had some concessions from the federal Government. It has put this matter back on the list for the forthcoming meeting for the special group. I mentioned earlier that I am concerned about the independence of the group that looks at these machines, and about the process; and I raise the matter for this very reason. When the independent group said on the previous occasion that it examined licences in this State that Western Australia should have another machine, the federal Government, under Dr Michael Wooldridge, totally ignored that view. We need that licence to support our kids and the people of Western Australia. The Government also needs those Liberal senators who have just been elected to support their State - not just run the party line. At the end of the day, this State must be able to set its priorities for its children - not, as I said yesterday, a bunch of bureaucrats in Canberra.