

HEALTH ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW COMMITTEE

Statement by Minister for Health

MR KUCERA (Yokine - Minister for Health) [9.10 am]: There is no doubt that the Western Australian health system, like all other health systems, faces many entrenched problems. Making the necessary changes will take time, hard work and support from those who care about health. One of the fundamental problems that the Government had to address was the flawed structure of the health system it inherited. One of my first acts as Minister for Health was to abolish the Metropolitan Health Service Board - another layer of bureaucracy that did nothing to improve efficiency or service delivery. Following the abolition of the board, I set up the Health Administrative Review Committee to recommend ways in which the system should be structured. Today I wish to report on the progress of the HARC reforms.

As many members will be aware, the new Director General of Health took up his appointment on 12 November last year. Two weeks later, the new state health management team of the Department of Health was put in place. This team brings together leaders in the areas of corporate and finance, health care, population health, country health services, the four metropolitan health services, including women and children's health, and the north, east and south health services. The creation of this team is the first time for many years - maybe even the first time ever - that all of the key players in the Department of Health have sat around one table to formulate a unified approach to problems in the system. People will be crucial in the reinvigoration of the health system. To that end, the positions of deputy director general corporate and finance, deputy director general health, executive director population health and executive director country services have all been advertised. Advertisements for the chief executive officers of the three metropolitan area health services and the women and children's health service will be placed very shortly. Plans for the restructure of all the newly-created divisions and areas are being developed, with the total new structure of the Department of Health scheduled to be in place fully within the coming months.

The state health management team is focusing strongly on creating greater efficiencies in the delivery of health services. To this end, the team has established change-management processes covering both clinical and corporate reforms; commenced the establishment of mechanisms for whole-of-system capital planning; undertaken the development of a policy and protocol for information management across the system; and commenced work on the development of long-term planning strategies.

In addition, a review and restructure of country health services will commence within the next month and be completed within approximately six months. Crucial to the HARC approach is the creation of avenues for greater consumer and clinical involvement in the health system. To that end, plans for the new health standards and surveillance watchdog - HealthWatch - are being developed with the advice of Professor D'Arcy Holman from the University of Western Australia's department of public health.

The HARC report recommended the establishment of a clinical senate to ensure involvement of a wider cross-section of clinical expertise in the planning and improvement of health services. An advertisement calling for expressions of interest for membership of the clinical senate will be placed in early March, with the first meeting expected in May. The clinical senate will have as one of its first tasks the consideration of ways of ensuring a greater involvement of, and coordination with, general practitioners in the Western Australian health system.

Plans are at an advanced stage for the creation of a health advisory council, consumer advisory council and mental health advisory council. Extensive planning for the future of mental health services is also taking place. A mental health project steering group is developing changes, and plans are being finalised for the establishment of the rehabilitation and aged care unit, in line with the HARC recommendation.

Dental health services will be more closely integrated into the department, with the director of dental health services reporting through the deputy director general health care. Quality and safety will be afforded top priority. A review of the Office of Health Review is expected to commence in the near future.

In summary, substantial progress has been made on almost all of the 24 recommendations. Within the next six months structural reform will be fully in place. The report will be operational and will enable a more planned and integrated range of quality health care services to the public of Western Australia.

Turning around the health system will not be easy and will not happen overnight, but getting the fundamentals right will lead to improvements across the system and ultimately deliver a better health service to Western Australians.