

KALGOORLIE REGIONAL HOSPITAL, NURSE SHORTAGE

288. Mr M.F. BOARD to the Minister for Health:

I refer the minister to his media statement on 3 October, which states -

The Government believes that by developing family friendly workplaces, this is one way that we can attract nurses back and reduce our reliance on agency staff, who can cost three times as much as a permanent employee.

- (1) Is the minister aware that Kalgoorlie Regional Hospital is approximately 50 nurses short of its needs and is being forced to fill the gap with expensive agency nurses?
- (2) Is the minister aware that 20 nurses who live in the town have indicated that they would return to full-time nursing if they were provided with greater roster flexibility and child care at the hospital?
- (3) Given the minister's recent commitment to greater roster flexibility and family-friendly initiatives, will the minister look into the issue at Kalgoorlie Regional Hospital; and, if not, why not?

Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:

- (1)-(3) I thank the member for Murdoch. However, as usual, he is about four weeks behind. Members of Cabinet were in Kalgoorlie for a regional cabinet meeting. I also visited Kalgoorlie recently and presented accreditation certificates to a number of nurses who have been at the hospital for over 30 years, as well as to a number of other employees who have worked in the kitchens for about 35 years - their jobs were not outsourced - and form part of the community of the Kalgoorlie hospital.

I do not know from where the member got his figures, but the agency nurse rates in Kalgoorlie are now the lowest they have been for many years. I believe the figure is down to about eight per cent. It was about 38 per cent at one stage. I will not be quoted specifically on that figure, but it was very high. Rather than do some of the cosmetic things that the previous Government wanted to do in the Kalgoorlie hospital, this Government has put a considerable amount of capital into accommodation this year. I visited the accommodation buildings while I was at the hospital; that is, the ones that we are currently building, the ones that we have built and those that need renovation.

The other issue that was discussed at length with the nursing staff was a security program. The security program at the Kalgoorlie hospital is now leading the State. Hopefully, that program will be put in place at Royal Perth Hospital in the near future. The nurses at the Kalgoorlie hospital designed that program. It is an incredibly sensible way of dealing with security issues within their hospital.

We also discussed at length family-friendly policies, and in particular the excellent paper that has been compiled by Helen Creed and has now been accepted across the medical scene in this State as a model with which to go forward.

The final issue that I discussed at length with the people at the hospital was a childcare unit for that hospital. We discussed the capital required for such a unit and the way it would operate. This is where people like the member for Murdoch seem to get off the track. This is not just about hospitals; this is about the provision of the entire health service for Kalgoorlie. Because we now have an area health authority in Kalgoorlie, for the very first time nurses from Laverton District Hospital have been volunteering to work in Kalgoorlie Regional Hospital as a backup when there are shortages during the holiday period. For the very first time we were able to work towards that.

A system of flexible rosters and practices will be developed during the time of this Government, and they will evolve. As the directors of nursing and the people who run the hospitals develop an area health authority, it will give them the flexibility to move people across.

The member for Eyre accompanied me to Kalgoorlie. He was well aware of the great work that was being done in the Kalgoorlie hospital. I was also well aware of the amount of work he had been doing in the areas of childcare services and support for the nurses and for the Laverton District Hospital etc. The Kalgoorlie Regional Hospital is to be congratulated for the way in which it has turned around its practices, cultures and programs. The hospital appreciates the support it has been given. More importantly, it appreciates the fact that I, as the minister, have visited the hospital on a number of occasions, as has the Cabinet. The Premier accompanied me on one occasion to see the excellent work the hospital is doing.

It is very easy to waltz into town, have a couple of dinners, wander up and down Hannan Street, and then come back to Perth and knock our great health service yet again. We are getting more negativity from the member for Murdoch, as usual.

Mr C.J. Barnett interjected.

The SPEAKER: I call the Leader of the Opposition to order for the first time.