

RURAL SURGICAL SERVICES

497. Mr TRENORDEN to the Minister for Health:

My question is to the Minister for Health, and I want to talk about one of his inadequacies with reference to the rural surgical service.

Withdrawal of Remark

Mr KOBELKE: It is inappropriate for the Leader of the National Party in asking a question to cast aspersions on the minister. I ask that he withdraw or that he not have the opportunity to ask a question.

The SPEAKER: I did not hear what the Leader of the National Party said. If he said something that was offensive, I ask him to withdraw it.

Mr TRENORDEN: Mr Speaker, I do not intend to repeat it for the record. I did not say anything that was at all offensive. However, I am prepared to withdraw it because this is question time. I will not play the games that were played earlier in this place.

Several members interjected.

Mr TRENORDEN: If the boys and girls would just calm down, I will ask a question of the Minister for Health.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr TRENORDEN: The rural surgical service for the past five years has provided a fly-in service for more than 5 000 patients in rural Western Australia. Will the minister commit to fund this vital service?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, members!

Mr Barnett: I have no idea what the question is. I cannot hear a word.

The SPEAKER: Members, I cannot hear what the Leader of the National Party is asking. Most of the noise is coming from my right-hand side. This is question and answer time. I want to hear both.

Mr TRENORDEN: I think a federal election might be on. Do you want me to start the question again, Mr Speaker?

The SPEAKER: Yes.

Mr TRENORDEN: My question is to the Minister for Health. I refer to the rural surgical service that for the past five years has provided a fly-in surgical service for over 5 000 patients in rural Western Australia. Will the minister commit to fund this vital service after its current funding runs out in February next year?

Mr KUCERA replied:

I thank the member for the question. I am advised that the operator of that service, Dr Tony House, will retire in January. He has operated a very good service. There are rural and regional staff shortages generally throughout the State. This Government is committed to putting in an extra \$6 million to move people into those areas, as well as increasing the patient assisted travel scheme by a further \$4 million. I was in Bunbury last month, and in Geraldton on Thursday, and the sum total of my discussions with the people in those areas is that it is far more preferable to start encouraging people to move to and live in those areas. Fly in, fly out services have had an impact on all parts of rural life in this State. I suspect that the National Party members in this House would be more than happy that we are moving people back into the rural and regional areas to provide services. The Government has made a commitment to put an extra \$4 million into PATS. In addition to that, we recently received notification of a commonwealth-funded program to enable us to assist all specialists - not just individual specialists - to travel into the country areas generally.

Finally, a very fine orthopaedic surgeon has now taken up residence in Bunbury. A number of surgeons are now servicing the large country towns, such as Geraldton, Albany, Port Hedland and Karratha. By putting in an additional \$6 million of state funding, we will ensure that those people are in those areas for the next four years - not only for the period of this budget, but also thereafter.