

JOONDALUP HEALTH CAMPUS

Grievance

MR A.P. O'GORMAN (Joondalup) [9.39 am]: I thank the Minister for Health for travelling to Joondalup during February to see at first hand what my concerns are with the Joondalup Health Campus. The campus was developed in 1996 under the former Government and at the time was privately managed. I headed up a group that was opposed to the privatisation of the hospital. The group raised a number of questions about the plans for expanding the hospital in the future. I was basically told to go away because I did not have to think about it. Now, seven years after the contract was signed, we are finding issues with the hospital facility. The facility was constructed to cater for 25 000 emergency department visits a year. There was no forward planning at that time for the future expansion of the facility to cope with the increases in population in the northern corridor. For the information of members, over the past 20 years, population increases in the northern corridor have topped out at 1 800 new residents a year, and over the next 20 years they are expected to top out at 5 000 new residents a year. There is therefore a huge need for expansion at the Joondalup Health Campus.

The emergency department was built in 1996, when it catered for 21 000 attendances a year. Last year there were 42 000 attendances at the health campus. In 2005-06 there are expected to be 46 000 attendances. That is an increase of approximately 200 per cent since 1996. The department needs to be upgraded to deal with the dramatic increase in attendances. Admissions to the hospital through the emergency department increased from 1 900 in 1996 to 10 000 last year, up 526 per cent. I reiterate that there were no plans for future expansion of the hospital when the contract was signed. Total admissions to the hospital, including those for elective surgery and the many other reasons that people are admitted to hospital other than from the emergency department, rose from 8 900 in 1996 to 32 400 in 2002, which is a percentage increase of 364 per cent. The level and spread of care at the hospital has also increased since 1996. The number of patients transferred to other hospitals such as Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and Royal Perth Hospital has decreased. For example, the number of transfers to Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital has decreased from 800 in 1996 to a little over 300 in 2002. This means that patients admitted through the emergency department of the Joondalup Health Campus are being treated on-site and released back into the community without the need for further hospitalisation. This is a record that I believe many of our secondary hospitals around the metropolitan area could only dream about. Joondalup is currently operating at approximately 98 per cent capacity, well in excess of what was planned when the hospital was redeveloped in 1996.

I am asking for an upgrade to be undertaken of the emergency department to cater for the 46 000 attendances that are estimated for 2005-06. An additional 50 public beds are also sought to cater for the increased number of admissions to the hospital that will come from the increased number of attendances at its emergency department. There is also a need to take up the elective surgery list on which Joondalup operates very successfully. The hospital is seeking an additional five operating theatres, which would be a net increase of three, as two existing theatres would be converted to provide other facilities. The hospital is also seeking an additional 20 mental health beds. I cannot express strongly enough the need for mental health beds in the northern suburbs. The Joondalup Health Campus currently has 25 mental health beds, of which 20 are general beds and five are secure beds. That facility operates at 100 per cent capacity and is in demand all the time. Patients are transferred to Graylands and Bentley Hospitals when it cannot cope with demand. A vascular radiology laboratory has been requested to cater for further elective surgery and to deal with vascular issues in the northern suburbs.

Mr R.F. Johnson: You must be in one of the 13 marginal seats.

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: The member for Hillarys was in government for eight years and I have never once heard him make any comment on the Joondalup Health Campus and the need to improve what his Government had provided. The previous Government did not build a big enough hospital and we are now suffering. The member should sit back, listen and let me do my job. I am helping my electorate get what it needs!

The SPEAKER: Order, members!

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: The redevelopment proposal has been put together in conjunction with the North Metropolitan Health Service and the Joondalup Health Campus. The general and mental health of people in the northern suburbs relies heavily on the services provided by the Joondalup Health Campus. The staff and administration of the hospital are to be commended for managing under such difficult circumstances since 1996. However, the current situation cannot be sustained. An additional 20 mental health beds at Joondalup Health Campus would service not only the northern corridor - sorry, I have read that already; the member for Hillarys put me off! I am surprised.

Mr R.F. Johnson: I have that effect on you, I know.

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: If the member for Hillarys had done his job over the past eight years -

Mr R.F. Johnson: If you had supported it at the time instead of being negative -

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: I did support it. I support it now, but the member for Hillarys does not. He does not support putting extra beds into Joondalup Health Campus and he does not support the campus itself.

I ask the minister to urgently consider this redevelopment proposal. The minister has first-hand knowledge of the situation in Joondalup. The minister has indicated to me that he accepts that Joondalup Health Campus is a top-class hospital in the northern suburbs. I thank the minister.

MR J.A. MCGINTY (Fremantle - Minister for Health) [9.44 am]: I thank the member for Joondalup for raising these very important matters that affect the health care of people in Perth's northern suburbs. The member for Joondalup and I visited the Joondalup Health Campus in February. I gained three great impressions from that visit. The first was of the quality of the building and of the facility, equipment and staff on offer to the public of the northern suburbs. The second was the way in which the hospital and its staff worked under pressure. All people who work in public hospitals in this State are under pressure; that is not confined to the tertiary hospitals. The staff put in a magnificent effort to cope with those pressures. The third impression I was left with was the tremendous scope that exists within the Joondalup Health Campus for additional work to be undertaken. That would need to be accompanied by an increase in capital commitment to the site to enable it to fulfil its true potential.

One of the great winners out of the Reid report, which will be released later this month, will be the far northern suburbs and the people of the Joondalup region. I can briefly mention two matters relating to Joondalup in that report as they are already in the public arena. The first is in the medium term. As members would be aware, it is proposed that each of the secondary or suburban hospitals, as they are sometimes referred to, should be increased to a 300-bed capacity. That number of beds is currently available at Joondalup through the mix of public and private beds, but I am talking about a significant increase in the number of public beds that will be available at Joondalup and at each of the secondary hospital sites throughout the metropolitan area. I will respond directly to the request by the member for Joondalup for extra beds to be provided. The Reid report recommends that that should be done in the short to medium term. I am sure that that will come to fruition.

The second thing the Reid report advocates for the far northern suburbs and Joondalup is a system whereby Perth will, in the first instance, be divided into two regions naturally separated by the river - a northern and a southern region - and that there be one teaching hospital as the focal point of each of those regions. That is why there is a proposal to build a new southern suburbs teaching hospital of some 600 beds - roughly double the size of the existing Fremantle Hospital - and to merge Royal Perth Hospital and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital to provide the equivalent facility for people north of the river. That is the short to medium-term proposal.

The longer-term proposal is to, in 10 to 15 years, upgrade Joondalup Health Campus to tertiary status. That will provide a tremendous boost to the health care of the people of not only Joondalup but also the northern suburbs generally. With that will come all the teaching and tertiary services associated with a teaching hospital, which in the past have been confined to inner urban areas of Subiaco, Perth and Fremantle. Assuming that this proposal is endorsed by Cabinet, it will be a giant step forward in the provision of tertiary standard health care to the people of the northern suburbs and Joondalup. Many of the issues the member has raised will flow from the implementation of the Reid review.

I was particularly impressed by the mental health services provided at Joondalup Health Campus. It currently has a 20-bed facility. I met with Dr Paul Skeritt at the hospital. He spoke to me about the pressure the staff are under and the need for more acute mental health beds. Access to acute mental health beds is generally under pressure. I hope that is something on which we can move quicker than is recommended by the Reid report to take some pressure off the system in that acute area. Massive demands are placed on mental health beds generally, but the acute area is one on which we share concerns.

The other issue that impressed me greatly was the capacity of both the emergency department and the elective surgery facilities at Joondalup. Joondalup Health Campus now has the second busiest emergency department in the metropolitan area, after Royal Perth Hospital. That is not fully recognised and would perhaps come as a surprise to many people given that Joondalup Health Campus has secondary status and not tertiary status. The number of people it treats is second only to Royal Perth. One statistic that disappointed me, however, was that 4 000 people presented at the emergency department at Joondalup Health Campus last year, but then walked away without being treated. That is no doubt the problem of waiting times in emergency departments. It highlights the need for initiatives to be taken.

Mrs C.L. Edwardes: It is because of the lack of after-care in medical practices in those far northern suburbs. A large number of people present to emergency departments who could very well have been seen by their general practitioner.

Mr J.A. McGINTY: I am sure that is part of it. The amount of time they have to wait to get treatment is another part, but I am told that they are not all just minor cuts and abrasions. Some of these people were in serious need of medical care and treatment, and they left before they received it. Nobody knows what happened to the 4 000 people involved. I give the undertaking to the member for Joondalup that I am committed to addressing that experience and that statistic in the very short term at Joondalup and at other places. I am sure that statistic is common elsewhere, with people walking out of emergency departments. Joondalup brought that issue home to me because people should be able to go to our public hospitals and receive the medical care they need. That will be addressed in the very short term.

The other issue is the capacity for elective surgery. A very large proportion of the elective surgery being undertaken as a result of the injection of \$10 million into the long waitlist cases is being transferred from Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and the tertiary hospitals out to Joondalup. The capacity should be available. Provided Joondalup can supply the surgeons, it has the beds and the facilities. We want a lot of this surgery, particularly for people from the northern suburbs, to be done at Joondalup. Joondalup has a very bright future ahead, particularly as a result of the Reid review.